

How to Pray with Shaking Hands

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Characters: [Wilbur Soot](#), [TommyInnit \(Video Blogging RPF\)](#), [Alexis | Quackity](#), [Technoblade \(Video Blogging RPF\)](#), [Phil Watson \(Video Blogging RPF\)](#), [Darryl Noveschosch](#), [Eret \(Video Blogging RPF\)](#), [Kristin Rosales Watson](#)
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How to Pray with Shaking Hands

by [lockergirl](#)

Summary

Wilbur sighed, rubbing his face. “Look kid, I don’t know what you’re doing here, but this is a holy temple. Go cause trouble somewhere else.”

“But I want to join your cult!”

Wilbur paused for a moment, opening his eyes to look at Tommy. The boy was staring back with an unbelievable level of earnestness.

“You— What?”

“Well, you’re the Blood God’s prophet, right? And you run his cult? I want to join.”

Or: At age 23, Wilbur became the Blood God’s prophet after seeing the deity in a vision. There’s just one problem: Wilbur is lying. (Tommy may or may not be said god.)

Notes

This fic is the third installment in my *Blood Brothers* series. I would SERIOUSLY recommend reading the first two fics first, if you want to understand this one to the fullest extent.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur wasn't sure about the whole "god" thing. Every time his father dragged him to the Temple of XD or his mother left out a sacrifice for Lady Death, he had to physically fight the urge to scoff.

Some of them were real, certainly. He had seen proof when the girl next door learned to walk on her 15th birthday, or when the fire that destroyed an entire city block left XD's temple and the people inside untouched. Wilbur understood that, on a literal level, gods were real, but he was doubtful about the finer details.

Take the Blood God, for instance.

Wilbur was utterly unconvinced that he was real. All the other gods had temples, but the Blood God didn't even have a shrine. What kind of god didn't care about collecting followers? On top of that, the deity barely appeared in any of the sacred texts, and any sightings of him were nothing more than rumors. Apparently he was twelve feet tall and had pink hair. Wilbur wasn't buying it.

It wasn't that Wilbur wasn't interested in religion. He liked the music and the myths, the theatricality of the sacrifices and festivals. He liked when his mother prayed for him, lighting candles on the windowsill. He just wasn't a fan of walking across the city three times a week in too-tight shoes, just to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in an incense-filled room. There weren't any temples in his neighborhood. They were all located in the city center, where the streets were paved and the people had money.

He hated standing in those gilded buildings, curled up against his mother in a hand-me-down yellow sweater. He hated the eyes that followed his family, shocked that they had the gall to show up looking so poor. No amount of penny-pinching or sewing seemed to hide the patches on their elbows or the holes in their shoes. Somehow, the torchlight of the temples made the fabric of their clothes look even more faded, revealing just how little they had.

It was embarrassing. It filled Wilbur with a gross sort of anger. Instead of praying, he imagined what it would be like to be like those people, rich and judgmental. Those people didn't have to drop out of school at 10 to work odds jobs, or go without dinners when the bills piled too high. They didn't have to walk to the well for water, or lose a son every time the new draft list was posted. Those people prayed because they felt like it. Wilbur's family prayed because they hoped it would keep them alive.

Secretly, Wilbur hated XD's temple. He hated the reminder that, no matter what they did, they'd always be seen as something lower.

His parents felt differently.

“We’re XD’s chosen people,” his mother stressed, “All of Essempi owes him our lives. He loved our king, and now he loves us.”

It was a story that Wilbur had heard a million times before. How XD, their country's patron god, had protected King George during a mysterious attack, leaving him as one of the only survivors. How XD, magnificent and almighty, had blessed King George with wisdom and longevity, allowing him to rule their nation with a generous hand. How XD, divine and perfect, would protect their kingdom forever.

Frankly, Wilbur was getting tired of hearing how great XD was.

He had to admit that, reading the history books, George seemed pretty cool. In his first month as king, the man had ended all the country’s wars, outlawed slavery, and reestablished relations with the few countries that didn’t outright hate them. He was always portrayed as a reluctant king, but a competent one.

The Essempi hadn’t had a king like that in a long time. It had been 150 years since George had disappeared, summoned by XD for something greater than the mortal realm could offer. The new kings had quickly fallen back into old habits, building up armies and pushing the borders steadily outwards. Wilbur hated it.

His father was a big fan.

“Why can’t you understand this, Wilbur?” the man yelled. It was the thousandth time they’d had this argument, words repeated over dinner tables and morning coffee. “We need to be fighting these wars!”

“We don’t need to be doing jackshit!” Wilbur shouted back. He ignored the way his mother’s fingers clenched around her mug, eyes glued to her lap. “We’re wasting all this money on weapons and bombs, and meanwhile there are literally tens of thousands of people starving in our own country, including us!”

His father slammed his fist down on the kitchen table. “These wars keep our country safe!”

Wilbur laughed, sounding more than a little manic. “Who? Who the fuck is being kept safe? The countries we’re invading? The soldiers who get shipped back in collapsible coffins? It sure as hell didn’t keep you safe, Dad! Safe people get to keep all their fucking limbs!”

It was a low blow. Wilbur’s father didn’t like talking about his right leg, amputated just below the knee. He saw it as a point of weakness, even if the veteran had gotten a medal of honor out of the sacrifice.

Wilbur had seen the way war chewed his father up and spit him out, angry and broken. He wasn’t going to let it happen to him, too.

“Just because you threw your life away,” Wilbur hissed, “doesn’t mean I have to kiss the military’s ass.”

“Wilbur!” his mother gasped, finally looking up at him.

“Get out of my home,” his father gritted out, looking far past furious. Wilbur didn’t need to be told twice.

A minute later, he was on the front porch, door slamming behind him. There was a different family crammed onto every floor of the three-story shack, and he hoped each and every one of them could hear his frustration. He hated this house. He hated his parents. He hated that even now, at age 23, he was filled with the same angst he had at 16, like he hadn’t grown at all.

Fuck this. Fuck this.

Over the past few years, the wars had grown larger and more terrible. The Essempi had become an empire again, and that came with a price. Half the boys Wilbur had grown up with had been stolen away by the army, whether through drafts or recruitment campaigns. *Join for the glory of XD*, the posters insisted, *Join to protect your people*.

After all this time, Wilbur still couldn’t understand what the army was protecting its people from. The Essempi were the invaders, the conquerors. If anything, *they* were the danger.

The only benefit to joining the army was that, if you happened to die, your family would get extra ration coupons for the rest of the year. Wilbur had seen the little green slips of paper himself. The mother next door had shown him them in between sobs.

Wilbur spent the rest of the day on the other side of the city, busking in front of Lady Death’s temple. Despite doing quite well, it angered him every time an emerald was dropped in his guitar case. These people didn’t need to worry about the war. Their sons weren’t being drafted. They didn’t have to care about money or bills or *surviving the week*—

One of his guitar strings snapped. Wilbur cursed under his breath.

The sun had started setting. Wilbur hadn’t grabbed his coat on the way out, and he didn’t fancy spending any of his hard-earned emeralds when his mom was already making dinner, so he reluctantly packed up and began to head home.

There was a covered wagon out front, and discussion coming from the open windows. Wilbur frowned. His family rarely had company over.

His confusion only deepened when he stepped inside.

Sitting at the kitchen table was a military officer, collecting some papers that Wilbur’s father had just signed.

“Thank you,” the officer said, smiling at Wilbur’s parents. “The country thanks your family.”

“Mom?” Wilbur asked, stepping into the room. All eyes shot to him. “What’s going on?”

Wilbur’s father pushed his chair out, standing to look his son in the eyes.

“Wilbur,” he said, voice eerily calm, “This good man here represents the draft.”

Wilbur's heart stopped. "What?"

"I went down to the army recruitment office this afternoon," his father continued, "and asked for your name to be moved up to the top of the draft list. They were more than happy to oblige."

"Welcome to the military, son," the officer smiled, placing a hand on Wilbur's shoulder. His teeth looked like gravestones. "We're glad to have you."

"No," Wilbur said, voice shaking, "I'm not— I don't want to go. You can't do this to me."

The officer's smile fell. The entire atmosphere of the room changed as he cleared his throat, looking at Wilbur with a false sort of pity.

"I'm afraid you've already been moved up to the front of the list. Which means, of course, that if you refuse to come with me, you'd potentially be facing execution."

There was nothing "potential" about it. Wilbur had heard stories of men who tried dodging the draft. At least if you died on the battlefield, you'd get a free coffin out of it, instead of an unmarked grave.

"I—" Wilbur started, but his father interrupted.

"Your mother packed you a bag, Wilbur. It's already in the wagon," he said, tone cold, "Don't make this nice man's job difficult."

Wilbur turned to his father. "How could you do this to me?" he asked, anger finally registering.

His father's expression did not change. "You need to learn some discipline and respect. The army will help with that."

"Help? If you send me out there, I'm going to die, Dad! I don't know how to fight!"

"Well then," the man said, sitting back down, "I suggest you learn."

Wilbur was so stunned that he couldn't move. Not until he felt a hand closing around his wrist.

It was the officer. "Let's get this show on the road, shall we?"

Unable to fully comprehend what was happening to him, Wilbur let himself get dragged out onto the street, manhandled as he was thrown into the back of the wagon.

"Don't cause any problems," the officer said, locking the bars that made up the back of the vehicle, "I'd hate to discipline you before we even get to camp."

Wilbur took a deep breath, trying desperately to figure out what to do. He wanted to scream, wanted to make a scene, wanted all the neighbors to come outside and watch as his father killed him, but for this first time in his life, no words came from his mouth. He couldn't

shout. He couldn't even speak. All he could do was panic, quiet and alone, as the back of the celled wagon.

Well, not alone. There was someone in here with him.

"You okay?" the stranger asked, adjusting his beanie. He was looking at Wilbur with curiosity. "What'd they throw you in here for?"

Before Wilbur could calm down enough to say something, the wagon jolted forward. Slowly, it began to pull away from Wilbur's home.

Quickly, he scrambled to the bars, desperate for one last glimpse of anything familiar. His father hadn't even followed him out of the house, but Wilbur's mother stood on the porch, eyes empty as she watched her only child get pulled away.

"Mom—!" Wilbur gasped, hand slipping through the bars.

His mother only shook her head, walking back into the house as the wagon turned the corner.

Something in Wilbur's heart broke. He pulled his hand back into the cell.

"Damn, that bitch is fucking cold," the stranger said, leaning forward slightly. There were no benches in the wagon, but the man seemed comfortable enough in the corner, sitting on the hay floor.

"She didn't even fight for me," Wilbur said, voice choked. He let himself collapse against the wall, pushing himself deeper into the wagon. He didn't want to watch as his neighborhood disappeared. Didn't want to watch the street corners he grew up on turn into memories. His mother had been bad enough.

The man shrugged. "Some parents suck. I'm Quackity, by the way."

Wilbur took a better look at the man. He seemed a bit younger than Wil, and a hell of a lot shorter, with black hair peeking out from underneath his hat. He also looked as though he hadn't gotten a proper shower in at least a week.

"My name's Wilbur," he replied weakly, doing his best not to completely collapse onto the ground. Every shake of the wagon threatened to undo his entire reality.

"If you don't mind me asking," Quackity said, "what was going on with your parents back there? Did they turn you in for draft dodging or something?"

Wilbur shook his head. "They signed me up without telling me."

Quackity whistled. "Shit. That's pretty fucked up."

Wilbur couldn't even bring himself to be annoyed at the man's prying. "Is that not what happened to you?"

"Nope," Quackity said, "I got arrested for running a poker table, and they decided that since the crime was nonviolent, I'd be the perfect candidate for the front lines." The man smiled, showing off a nice set of teeth. "Isn't that crazy? You'd think they'd want the violent ones out there."

Wilbur didn't respond. Quackity seemed to accept this.

"Hey," Quackity said, leaning even further forward, "The two of us should stick together, right? Watch each other's asses?"

Wilbur still felt completely out of it.

"What?"

"I mean," Quackity smiled, "we troublemakers need to be a team out there, if we want to avoid dying."

Something hardened in Wilbur's chest. With a new resolve, he sat up straighter.

"We can be allies," he said, looking Quackity dead in the eyes, "but with or without you, I'm not going to die."

"Hey, sounds like a good plan to me," the man responded, pulling his hat down and settling back, "I wish you all the luck with that."

The wagon pulled its way out of the city. Wilbur did his best not to cry.

Wilbur was half-convinced that he was already dead. It would make sense if this was hell.

They had given him and Quackity three days of training before sending them out to the front lines. Neither of them could hold a sword properly, and Quackity was even more miserable with a bow. The army had also given Wilbur a bag of explosives, assigning him the role of "demolitions expert" after only 30 minutes of instruction. It was a job no one else wanted because the TNT was prone to going off too early, but Wilbur had never even gotten the chance to set any of it. Everything had gone sideways almost immediately, their troop ambushed and half-slaughtered before an hour had passed.

Wilbur had never watched somebody die before. He certainly had never watched 15 people die at once, surprised by more arrows than Wilbur thought possible. Those who had avoided an arrowhead through the neck had been chopped down by swords. Their enemies had been well-prepared, covered head to toe in armor. A few had even had enchanted pieces. Wilbur and his peers only had leather to cover their chests.

The Essempi soldiers had never stood a chance. It had only been *three days*.

Quackity had fled first, but Wilbur had been quick to follow, running farther and farther from the bloodbath behind them. Without looking back, Wilbur ducked under branches and leapt over streams, pushing deeper and deeper into the untouched forest, trusting whichever turns his friend, Quackity, made.

It hadn't been long, but the two of them had been glued to each other's sides since meeting. They were the only reluctant pair in their entire troop, not to mention the only ones with a sense of humor. Everyone else was younger, more starry-eyed. Their comrades dreamed of glory or heroism, rather than a way back home.

And Wilbur had watched them all die. Only he and Quackity, pulling up the back of the train, had managed to get away. Wilbur hadn't even drawn his sword.

After a few minutes of running, Quackity stopped in a clearing, letting Wilbur rush past him. Both of them moved to lean against a tree, panting.

"Fuck," Wilbur said, "This is—"

A clang rang out from behind him. Head whipping around, Wilbur turned just in time to watch Quackity, unstable on his feet, parry an enemy soldier's attack. Their drill sergeant had never taught them proper stances. He barely had time to teach them how to draw their swords.

Wilbur's heart sunk. They had been followed. He reached for his weapon, but everything was happening too quickly. Within moments, the enemy's sword slashed through Quackity, dropping him to the ground like an anvil.

In that moment, Wilbur would have liked to feel a wave of protectiveness. He would have liked to feel duty or anger. But he didn't. He only felt fear.

The enemy charged towards him. Wilbur pulled out his sword at the last possible moment, stumbling back as he blocked the attack.

"Die!" the enemy shouted. It was kind of a silly order, all things considered.

Wilbur raised his sword, preparing to deflect another blow, but as the soldier surged forward —

He tripped. The man tripped on some divot in the ground, armor too heavy to regain his balance immediately.

A jolt shot through Wilbur's body. This was his chance.

Without hesitating, he lunged forward, swiping his sword through the enemy's neck. A few seconds later, the man was on the ground, spasming as the life flowed out of him.

Wilbur didn't have time to deal with that. He dropped his sword, rushing towards his friend.

There was a horrible slash that stretched from Quackity's eye to his stomach, blood spilling across nearly every inch of skin. Wilbur's chest clenched. Quackity was bleeding out in front

of him. Quackity, whose words were quicker than his sword. Quackity, who preferred flirting or teasing to sparring. Quackity, who was going to *die* if Wilbur didn't do something.

"You've got to stay awake for me, okay?" Wilbur said, rummaging through his bag for anything resembling first aid supplies, "You're not allowed to close your eyes."

"Wil—" Quackity gasped, body tensing as though the very word hurt him.

"You don't have to say anything. Just stay awake." There were no first aid supplies in his bag. Honestly, the army probably hadn't expected him to survive this long. Why waste medical supplies on a dead man?

"Whate'r you say, handsome," Quackity said, somehow managing to slur and grit his words at the same time.

On a better day, Wilbur would have gleefully returned the banter, but now, he just leaned forward and prayed.

Please, XD, he thought, putting his whole soul into it, I need some divine intervention right now. Quackity's going to die if you don't help him. Please. Please, I'm begging you.

After a few seconds, Wilbur peaked his eyes open. He had heard stories of men praying to XD, only for them to open their eyes and see an overwhelming sea of green light. But there was nothing. No light. No help. Just Quackity, growing weaker by the moment.

Wilbur scowled. Fuck this. He might as well be praying to the Blood God, for all the good it was doing him.

Taking matters into his own hands, Wilbur rushed to the corpse of the enemy soldier and peeled back his armor. The body was wearing both a shirt and an undershirt. Wilbur ripped both of them off with his sword, making long strips of fabric. Then, he did the same with the man's pants, as well as his own shirt. Quackity's cut was large. It needed as many bandages as possible, even if the only fabric Wilbur could offer was already dirty and soaked in sweat.

Returning to his friend, Wilbur opened his waterskin, using what he had left to wash out the still-bleeding wound. Then, apologizing under his breath, he sat Quackity up, doing his best to ignore the man's pained cries.

A few minutes later, Quackity was back on the ground, bandages covering most of the upper half of his body. He was muttering Wilbur's name softly, high-pitched and silly.

Only then did Wilbur let himself think.

He didn't want to go back to the army. He didn't want to die on the front lines. It had been pure luck that saved him the first time. In many ways, it felt like that luck had already run out.

Then don't go back, some voice in Wilbur's head whispered. The realization shot through him. Technically, he was MIA right now. If he left, they'd mark him down as dead within the

month. If he left, he could join some random village. He could start a new identity, and avoid the war. He could survive.

Wilbur looked down at his friend. If he left, Quackity would die.

They made it to the nearest Essempi camp a full 7 hours later, with Quackity on Wilbur's back. Blood had leaked through the makeshift bandages, gluing the men together as Wilbur hiked in the direction of the setting sun. He didn't bother praying.

The moment Wilbur was noticed by a patrolling officer, a horn was sounded. Only then did he let himself collapse. Within minutes, the two survivors were carted off to the medic's tent.

A few hours later, when Wilbur was finally approached, he was ready. The 7 hour trek had given him plenty of time to think. He knew his next move. He knew what to answer. He knew how to keep himself safe.

"How did you survive the attack?" the commander asked, suspicion and curiosity drawn tight across his face.

Wilbur smiled with as much reverence as he could muster. "The Blood God," he lied simply, "He appeared to me. He asked me to be his prophet."

Chapter End Notes

What??? The first-ever Blood Brothers chapter without Tommy???? Don't worry, y'all, he's coming really soon, and then we will *finally* have 4/4 SBI. We just had to get through Wilbur's backstory first.

Wilbur technically has the cushiest backstory because he's the only one who wasn't a child soldier. Lucky bastard.

(Shoutout to AO3 user [MistBorn_SprenDeath](#) for partially inspiring this fic. Way back on fic #1 they commented "cult scams just got 1000% funnier" and that phrase has been plaguing my every waking moment ever since.)

ALSO: I have started actually using Twitter! [Consider following me on there for updates and stuff.](#)

As always, I cherish all comments like my own children, and then I eat them to fuel the next chapter. Just like real children.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The next day was filled with questions and regeneration potions. After explaining his story to the commander, Wilbur was forced to repeat it to what felt like every officer at the base.

“The Blood God saved me,” he insisted every time, “I don’t belong on the battlefield. He wants to claim me as a priest.”

Reactions were mixed. A few of the officers stared at him in awe, asking desperately what it was like to meet a god. The rest looked at him skeptically, stuck somewhere between disdain and pity, as though he was simply another shell-shocked soldier who was losing his mind.

As the sun set over the horizon, Wilbur was finally relieved from questioning. Followed by two other soldiers, he was corralled back to his tent, where Quackity lay waiting.

According to one of the medics, the injured man had woken up around noon, shouting in pain and confusion until he had been sedated. One of the things he had yelled was apparently Wilbur’s name.

Luckily, as Wilbur entered the tent, there was no screaming.

“Wilburrrrrrr,” Quackity cooed, pitching his voice high. The man was lying in a cot, absolutely covered in bandages.

Wilbur smiled. He recognized the expression on Quackity’s face. The guy was high as shit. “Quackityyyyy,” he sang back, matching the man’s near-squeal.

Quackity giggled. “They— They gave me a lot, Wilbur,” he said, voice still mockingly high.

Wilbur hummed, looking around the tent. There were four cots in total, but two of them were mercifully empty and unmade. At least the base had given them a small bit of privacy. “A lot of what?”

Quackity tried to lean forward, but his head immediately fell back onto the pillow. He waved his hand wildly, gesturing for Wilbur to move closer. “Drugs,” he stage-whispered, looking very much like he was telling the truth.

“Oh? Why’d they give you drugs?”

“My... my fucking eye, man!” Quackity blinked, though the bandages around his left eye hid the grand reveal. “It doesn’t work. And they took my fucking teeth!” Quackity made an exaggerated grimace, displaying two new holes. They matched up perfectly with what would eventually be his new scar.

“Well, I hate to break it to you,” Wilbur said, “But I don’t think the doctors stole your teeth. I think they might have been knocked out when that sword hit your face.”

“What!” Quackity shouted, incredulous, “No. No, no, no, that isn’t... isn’t right.” The man blinked, clearly trying to ground himself in the moment. “I... *fuck*. What are we talking about?”

“Hey, Quackity, hey,” Wilbur said, trying to get his friend’s attention, “I’ve got to tell you something important.”

“What, you gonna tell me I’m sexy?” Quackity said, words becoming increasingly slurred, “Because newsflash: I know that already, fuckin’ piece of shit.”

“No, I—” Wilbur wasn’t sure how he was supposed to communicate his plan to Quackity when the man was in this state. “Quackity. We’re not going to be soldiers anymore.”

“Um, we’re in the army?” Quackity said, a bit more distantly than Wilbur would have liked.

He grabbed one of the man’s hands and squeezed it tight, focusing his friend’s attention. “Quackity,” he said firmly, “I had a vision of the Blood God. He asked me to be his prophet.”

Quackity let out a laugh. “No fuckin’ way,” he said, closing his eyes, “You’re fucking with me...”

Wilbur grimaced. “Quackity, I’m being dead serio—”

Without warning, the flap of the tent was pulled open, a group of men stepping inside.

The atmosphere changed instantly. All of the intruders were wearing long, heavy-looking robes of various colors, but Wilbur wasn’t fooled by their lack of armor or weapons. They had an air of power to them, something that made the hairs on the back of Wilbur’s neck stand up.

In the middle of the group was a man, tall, lanky, and dressed head-to-toe in black robes. There was a hood pulled over his head, partially obscuring his face.

The man looked up. Behind a pair of glasses, his eyes were pure white.

Wilbur tensed.

“Hello!” the man said cheerfully. He gave Wilbur and Quackity a big smile and a little wave. “It’s nice to meet both of you!”

“Who are you?” Quackity asked, eyes narrowing to an almost comical extent. Wilbur did his best to not hit him.

“My name’s Bad!” the robed man said, taking no offense to Quackity’s rude tone. He stepped a bit closer. “Are either of you Wilbur Soot?”

“Yeah, this bitch,” Quackity said, slapping Wilbur’s stomach. It might have hurt if the attacker hadn’t been so thoroughly drugged.

For the first time since meeting them, Bad’s smile slipped from his face. “Language, please,” he insisted, before turning to face Wilbur.

The man’s eyes were even more unnerving when they were focused entirely on one person. Now that Wilbur could get a clearer look at them, he realized that they weren’t simply cloudy or injured. They were pure white, like perfect marble, as though no pupil or iris had ever existed in them. And yet, as Bad’s gaze scanned Wilbur up and down, he could see some sort of recognition in the man’s eyes, as though they were functioning normally.

“You’re the one who claims he met the Blood God?” Bad asked, clearly curious.

Claims. So that was where Wilbur stood. “Yes,” he said, “He appeared to me in battle.”

Bad smiled good-naturedly. “Miraculous. What was he like?”

“Er...” Wilbur faltered slightly. “Bloody? I didn’t get a good look at him.”

Bad laughed. “Yeah, that makes sense. You know, there’s no accurate statues of the Blood God in the capital? He rarely ever reveals himself, so we’re not quite sure what he looks like. A lot of conflicting descriptions.” Bad raised an eyebrow conspiratorially. “My bet is that he can shapeshift.”

Wilbur frowned. “Shapeshift?”

“Yeah! You know, like blood and DNA? Maybe he can manipulate how he looks! That’s why sometimes he’s a warrior and sometimes he’s a kid...” Bad laughed. “You know, one witness even claimed he had wings? Isn’t that silly?”

Wilbur was completely caught off-guard by how casual the conversation was. He had expected another interrogation, especially with all of the ominous, robed men standing just off to the side, but Bad was speaking as though they were old friends.

“I’m sorry if this is out of line,” Wilbur said, trying to sound put-together, “But... who exactly are you? Why are you interested in the Blood God?”

Bad tilted his head. “Well, I think *everyone’s* going to be interested in the Blood God. He basically disappeared for 200 years, and then he shows up randomly to pick a prophet? People are going to wonder about that.”

Wilbur did his best not to tense. This was not the time to show weakness. “And you’re one of those people?”

“Oh course!” Bad said, “It’s my job! I’m the kingdom’s high priest, after all.”

Wilbur nearly stopped breathing. He had expected to be questioned, but never in his wildest imagination did he expect the High Priest himself to be sent to interrogate him. This man should be advising the king, not standing next to Quackity’s cot.

“You...” Wilbur’s mouth felt dry. “You run the Temple of XD?”

Bad smiled wider. “I run *all* the temples. You know how it is. I make sure everyone’s getting what they need, doing what they’re *supposed* to do...”

Bad wasn’t technically threatening him, but Wilbur still felt unsafe. He had only just learned the stakes of this conversation. If the High Priest didn’t believe his story, he wouldn’t get sent out to the front lines again. He’d probably be executed immediately for blasphemy. High priests could do basically whatever they wanted.

“That’s very impressive,” Wilbur said.

“Thank you!” Bad chirped, sounding genuinely pleased and upbeat. “You’re very impressive too! I mean, you must have done *something* to catch the Blood God’s attention. Do you know when the last time he revealed himself was?”

Wilbur shook his head, putting on what he hoped was a charismatic smile. “Sorry, no. He didn’t really have the time to fill me in on his backstory. I was fighting for my life out there.”

Bad nodded. “That makes sense.” Some tight pit in Wilbur’s chest loosened at those words. “Not many people know about it anyway.”

“Know about what?” Quackity whined, head rolling back onto his pillow. He had clearly been tuned out of the conversation for the past minute, eyes worryingly foggy.

Bad ignored him. “200 years ago,” the high priest explained, voice suddenly serious, “19 kings and generals were slaughtered, one right after the other. There were almost no links between them, other than that they were powerful leaders. Every week, another castle would see a bloodbath.”

Somehow, Bad’s straightforward description managed to paint a horrible picture in Wilbur’s mind. He could imagine the bloody hallways and torn bodies. It had probably looked like the battlefield he had just escaped from.

“Obviously, about halfway through this whole situation, everyone in power got scared that they were next. A few rulers went into hiding, but it didn’t matter. If it was their turn to die, that was that.” Bad shrugged. “Our king at the time, George, referred to it in official reports as ‘the Blood God’s revenge.’ No one really knows what he meant by that, but he seemed pretty resolute that these people were being killed because they had wronged the Blood God. No one can prove whether he was right or not, but if he was, then that would be the most recent sighting of the deity.” Bad looked back up at Wilbur. “Until now.”

Wilbur hated the feeling of those empty eyes on him. They weren’t soulless, but there was no life in them. No spark.

“So my question is why now?” Bad looked at Wilbur closely. “Why you?”

Wilbur took a deep breath. “I don’t know,” he confessed, “I’ll tell you as soon as I figure it out.”

Packing was quick and easy. All Wilbur owned was his bag from home and the explosives he never got to set off. He wrapped the TNT carefully in his clothes, praying to no one in particular that Bad wouldn't snoop through his items. He prayed equally hard that the explosives wouldn't accidentally go off during the trip. Wilbur didn't want to leave anything behind. Not when he knew so little about what was going to happen to him.

Bad had been eager to bring the Blood God's new prophet back to the capital as soon as possible, making plans to leave first thing in the morning. He was a little less excited about bringing Quackity, who kept cursing in front of him, but Wilbur promised that the behavior was just the painkillers.

Not that the potions seemed to be helping much anymore. Quackity was visibly gritting his teeth for the entire carriage ride to the capital, every bounce and divot seeming to pull a gasp from his lips.

The man was clearly sobering up, and he did not look particularly happy about it. Every time Wilbur made eye contact with him, Quackity's message seemed clear: *I'm going along with this, but you've got a shit-ton of explaining to do.*

That was fine. Quackity was pretty easy to ignore, now that he wasn't interjecting every 45 seconds with the ramblings of a stoned man. Bad carried most of the conversation anyway.

"You're going to love the Blood God's temple," he gushed, as cheerful and rosy as ever, "It's a bit of a fixer-upper, since no one's used it in a few centuries, but it's really got some adorable architecture."

Wilbur nodded. "I'm excited to see it."

"I sent ahead for some of my men to tidy it up, so the floors should be swept, which means— Oh look!"

Bad was gesturing out the window, pointing to the largest temple Wilbur had ever seen. It had to be at least ten stories tall, with marble columns stretching the entire way up. As their carriage passed it, Wilbur could spot a giant statue inside its open doors, reaching all the way to the ceiling.

Wilbur had thought the temples in his home city were extravagant, but they were nothing compared to this building. In fact, everything about the capital seemed larger and busier. People elbowed past each other on the sidewalks, cramming themselves into an unending number of shops and alleyways. Buildings stretched taller, as though anything that wasn't at least five stories high was a waste of space. Even street corners, which in Wilbur's hometown might contain a single busker or some kids playing jacks, were packed with vendors and beggars alike trying to catch a passerby's attention.

And that didn't even describe how varied everything looked. The people in the crowds seemed like they had been plucked at random from every corner of the globe, diverse in appearance and clothing. The buildings were equally varied, as though a different builder had designed each one with no concept of what its neighbors would look like. Even the streets were inconsistent. By Wilbur's count, the carriage had already rolled its way across dirt, cobblestone, and concrete in the past 15 minutes.

As the carriage turned a corner, the temple disappeared from view.

"That was the Temple of XD!" Bad said, "I could give you a tour later if you'd like. It's the city's most popular tourist destination, and we have services and rituals three times a day."

"I might take you up on that," Wilbur smiled, doing his damndest to appear charming, "How far are we from the Blood God's temple?"

"Just at the end of this street," Bad said.

The street in question was notably more empty than the ones they had just been on. There were still a few people and vendors, but the locals eyed the carriage a bit more suspiciously.

The vehicle ran over a massive pothole. Quackity cursed, not quite managing to keep it under his breath.

"Language!" Bad scolded, "But, we're here!"

Wilbur stepped out of the carriage, looking at the temple in front of him. It was shockingly lackluster compared to what XD's had been. The thing was barely two stories tall, and there was a thick layer of grime covering its facade. Wilbur couldn't tell if the temple had been built of some reddish-brown stone, or if it was just that dirty. Several of the windows were also boarded up.

It was a dump. But even this was leagues better than the front lines.

"Like I said," Bad announced, somehow still optimistic and cheerful, "it's a bit of a fixer-upper. We haven't had a Blood Priest working here since King George's reign, can you believe that?"

Wilbur just nodded, taking stock of the building. Behind him, Quackity exited the carriage. Thanks to the insane amount of healing potions the man had been given, he was already back on his feet, leaning on a crutch to help keep his balance.

"Wow, this place looks like shit," Quackity said, easing himself forward.

"Language!" Bad gasped, "This is a sacred temple!"

"He knows that!" Wilbur interjected, "And he's very glad to be here, *right*, Quackity?"

Quackity grinned. "Of course. I'm just saying that someone should probably fix the windows."

Bad led the group towards the front doors, a few robed guards following them. True to Bad's word, the inside was a bit cleaner, though everything still looked old and half-abandoned. Like XD's temple, there was a statue of the Blood God standing behind an altar, carved from stone.

The statue was a bit unnerving. It had no face, and only a vague reference to hair. The shoulders were broad and the clothes looked fancy, but there was absolutely nothing to recognize in it. On the wall behind the statue was graffiti, with the words "BIG MAN" and an arrow pointing towards the Blood God's apparent likeness.

"I think it has a lot of promise!" Bad said, somehow giving the impression of a newlywed touring a newly-built house, "But it's already perfect for your first sacrifice this afternoon!"

Wilbur startled at that. "What?"

Bad smiled. "Well, what better way to restart this temple than with a good, old-fashioned sacrifice? We've got to thank the Blood God for saving your life, after all. I've already had some ceremonial robes delivered. They're in the side room, right over there. If you get changed now, we can probably get started right away!"

Wilbur nodded. "Uh, sure. Quackity, do you mind helping me get changed?"

Quackity, who had been listening closely, jumped in without hesitation. "Yes," he said bluntly, already moving towards the side room.

The space in question was a small changing area, furnished with a simple dresser and bench. Quickly, Wilbur removed two plain, red robes from where they were hanging, handing one to Quackity.

The man held his hand up. "If you try to get that shit on me, I'm going to scream," Quackity threatened, "It hurts enough having regular clothes pressing against my bandages."

Wilbur winced. "Sorry."

"Yeah, you should be fucking sorry," Quackity said, lowering his voice, "What the fuck is going on?"

"We're going to be priests," Wilbur said, "I didn't want to be a soldier, you didn't want to be a soldier... it felt like a good alternative."

"Why the Blood God, though?" Quackity asked, gesturing to the building around them.

"I didn't pick the Blood God, Quackity," Wilbur insisted, "He picked me."

Quackity's expression could generously be called skeptical.

"Yeah, sure," Quackity said, "But for real though."

Wilbur threw the robes over his head, pulling them down. "Who would you have picked, then?"

“Don’t you fucking dare turn this around on me!” Quackity hissed, “I asked you first!”

“Look, we don’t have time for this,” Wilbur said, “I’ve got to figure out how to lead a religious ceremony.”

“Well, good thing you’re already wearing red,” Quackity said humorously, “They’re probably going to make you kill some pigeons or something.”

Wilbur paled. “Do you really think that?”

“I mean, most of the temples do animal sacrifices, and this *is* the Blood God, so there’s probably going to be blood involved.”

Wilbur fought the urge to throw up. “Oh gods.”

“Don’t you look to me,” Quackity said, moving back towards the door now that Wilbur was wearing the robes, “You’re the one who picked the Blood God.”

“I didn’t pick—”

“Look, Wilbur,” Quackity interrupted, “I’m glad that you’re doing this. I’m thankful that you saved me and gave me a way out of the war. I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll be your right hand man.” His eyes narrowed. “But don’t fucking lie to me about this. I may have been dying, but I was watching you the entire time. No one saved you. You did all of that by yourself.”

Wilbur’s breathing paused for a moment. “You’re not going to tell—”

“No, of course I’m not fucking going to tell!” Quackity said, a bit of laughter returning to his voice, “Are you crazy? We’re in this together now! For better or for worse.”

Wilbur paused for a moment, before reaching out to squeeze Quackity’s hand. “Together, then.”

With a nod, the two of them pushed their way out of the changing room.

It had been a bit of an anticlimactic entrance for Wilbur. Although the new priest had been ready to improvise, Bad had apparently stepped out of the temple to get the supplies needed for the ritual, leaving behind a few of his guards to make sure Wilbur and Quackity didn’t do anything stupid.

Now, nearly an hour later, the two of them were sitting in one of the pews, still waiting for the High Priest to return.

“What do you think he’s going to make me do?” Wilbur asked, probably for the thousandth time.

Quackity opened his mouth to respond, but before he could say anything, there was a slamming sound behind them.

“Who’s ready for a sacrifice!” Bad shouted, walking into the temple with clicking footsteps.

Wilbur stood up immediately, shooting his gaze towards the door, but—

There was a person. Behind Bad, held tight by two of his guards, was a person.

They were dressed immaculately, with red silk draped over a pure white top and skirt. Their hair was fluffy and brown, not unlike Wilbur’s, and their chest and wrists were decorated with golden necklaces and bracelets. Individually, each part of them was quite breathtaking.

But none of that was what caught Wilbur’s attention. What made him stop were the pieces of red fabric, bright and terrible, tied around the person’s eyes, mouth, and wrists.

The person was trying to scream. It was muffled by the gag in their mouth.

“Bad, I— What’s going on?” Wilbur asked, watching as the person got dragged down the aisle up to the altar.

“That’s the sacrifice, silly!” Bad smiled, “I did a lot of research, and apparently the Blood God prefers human sacrifices! Who am I to deny a god his wishes?”

The offering tried to scream again, thrashing as their ankles and wrists were tied down to the altar with more red fabric.

Vacantly, Wilbur felt himself get led forward. Someone, probably Bad, pressed a knife into his hand.

“I know you’re new to this,” Bad said comfortingly, “But you’re the Blood God’s chosen one, right? He wants you to do this.”

All at once, Wilbur was standing above the altar. Tears were streaming down the offering’s face, soaking through the blindfold.

“What—” Wilbur gasped, “Who is this?”

Bad waved his hand dismissively. “Some prisoner of war from one of our campaigns. I don’t know. It’s not important.”

How could it not be important? Wilbur was about to take someone’s life, and Bad thought it wasn’t important?

“I—” Wilbur could hardly get a sound out. He was used to words coming easy. Words were what had gotten him off the front lines, what had gotten him to the safety of the capital. Now they were failing him.

No one interrupted. No one stepped in as Bad grabbed Wilbur's wrist, raising the blade higher.

"He wants this," Bad whispered, gently positioning the knife over the offering's heart, "The Blood God wants you to do this."

The Blood God. Why the fuck had Wilbur chosen a *war* god to lie about? In trying to escape the bloodshed, he had cornered himself in.

All at once, he saw the bodies of his comrades laying across the altar. He saw the enemy soldier he had killed. He saw Quackity, weak and bleeding.

He looked up, momentarily, and met his friend's gaze.

Quackity looked horrified. Like what was happening was wrong.

This... this was wrong.

All at once, Wilbur's words came back to him.

"No," he gasped, pulling the knife back. His wrist broke from Bad's grip.

The High Priest looked confused. "*No?*"

"The Blood God... He doesn't want this. Blood is sacred to him. Spilling it like this will only anger him."

Bad did not look remotely convinced. "This is the way people have sacrificed to him for centuries!"

"It's the wrong way!" Wilbur bluffed, "The Blood God has been ignoring us for centuries! Have you ever thought that maybe it's because he doesn't like the sacrifices we're giving him?"

Bad stopped at that. Wilbur took the opportunity.

"Look," he said, cutting the restraints around one of the offering's wrists before anyone could stop him. As the offering pulled away desperately, he slipped a few gold bracelets off their wrist, raising them up to the ceiling.

"Oh Blood God!" he shouted, "Accept our sacrifice!"

Wilbur slammed the jewelry onto the altar. Nothing happened.

The offering quickly used their free hand to remove their blindfold, reaching frantically for the bindings around their other wrist. The guards pinned them down to the altar before they could undo the knots.

"Don't touch them!" Wilbur shouted, somehow managing to startle the guards into stopping.

“Listen to what he says,” Bad ordered, not a hint of emotion in his voice.

The guards stepped back. Wilbur didn’t waste the opportunity.

With his knife, he broke the other restraints, painfully aware of all the eyes on him. Within a minute, the offering was free, pulling the gag from their mouth and scooting away from Wilbur.

“I’m very sorry about all of this,” Wilbur apologized, lowering the knife, “What’s your name?”

The offering looked around nervously, blue eyes finally stopping on Wilbur. “... Eret.”

Wilbur nodded. “Eret, you are officially under the protection of the Blood God." Fuck, he needed to say something fancier. "Um, anyone who hurts you violates his will.”

Wilbur had never seen so much surprise on one person’s face. Eret seemed completely beside himself, unable to register what was happening.

“Thank you,” they whispered, hardly moving.

Bad hummed, forcing Wilbur’s attention back to the High Priest. The man didn’t look particularly pleased.

“I guess we’ll see,” Bad said, looking at the bracelets, “if your sacrifice is accepted.”

Wilbur and Quackity were given separate rooms, both in the basement of the temple. Eret had been shoved into some old closet, looking as though they were hardly able to believe their own luck.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Bad said, closing Wilbur’s bedroom door behind him. The prophet’s singular bag had been left at the foot of his bed, contents untouched. “I hope you sleep well.”

So far, Wilbur hadn’t slept at all. He wasn’t sure if he’d even be able to sleep again. His hands wouldn’t stop shaking.

The Blood God wasn’t real. That meant he wouldn’t accept the sacrifice. When Bad came back and saw that the bracelets were still there, he’d kill Wilbur for blasphemy, and maybe sacrifice Quackity and Eret for good measure. Apparently that was something people did in the capital.

Wilbur shot out of bed. One thing was clear: the offerings couldn’t still be on the altar come morning. If they were, it was a death sentence.

Carefully, Wilbur crept out of his room, sneaking up the stairs. Bad had left a few guards outside the temple, but none in the main room. It would almost be too easy.

Wilbur could do this. More importantly, he could *keep* doing this, forever.

Sooner than he knew it, Wilbur had slipped into the main room, mind racing with places to hide the bracelets.

He almost stopped breathing when he realized he wasn't alone.

Sitting on the altar, legs swinging and wrists covered in gold, was a teenage boy.

Chapter End Notes

So many of you pointed out that SBI is just...

Techno and Phil: *tragic child soldier backstories*

Wilbur after about an hour and a half on the battlefield: "Yeah no I'm done with this."

"I wonder which DSMP character lockergirl will add to this story about a cult—" UMMM the man who canonically runs a cult. Next question.

And we finally have a Tommy appearance in the last sentence! Crimeboys enthusiasts, I hope you're excited (he was supposed to actually talk to Wilbur this chapter, but this installment was already WAY too long).

And may I just say: Thank you SO MUCH for all of the support on this fic. After only one chapter, there were 100 bookmarks and 660 kudos. That is INSANE. I love you all so much, and your comments genuinely fuel me to write. Thank you!!!!

Anyway check out my [Twitter](#). I'm going to have some relevant polls on there soon.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For a minute, Wilbur did nothing. It was almost as though he was dreaming, watching the teenager remove and reclip the golden bracelets over and over again. It shouldn't have been possible. Bad had stationed guards outside the temple. How had this kid gotten in?

Maybe he was a squatter, or a runaway. He certainly looked the part, alone in the middle of the night with no bags or jacket. The kid's clothes were simple and dull, a far cry from the usual silks and satins that were expected of temple-goers. He didn't even look particularly clean, with his hands and knees being especially dirty.

After taking most of the bracelets off once again and throwing them back onto the altar, the teenager scooted over to inspect the red fabric that had been used to tie Eret down. It had been completely ruined by Wilbur's knife, but scraps of it remained tied to the four corners of the table.

Wilbur took a step forward. The kid spun around immediately.

For a moment, neither of them moved. Then, the kid grinned.

"Hullo!" he shouted, voice loud enough to be heard across the room, "How goes it?"

"How the *fuck* did you get in here?" Wilbur replied, incredulousness dripping from every word.

The kid took the question in stride. "Oh, the basement has a broken window. If you get down on the ground, you can kind of crawl through it."

"So you just decided to trespass?"

The teen blinked. "Uh, yeah, basically."

Wilbur sighed, rubbing his face. "Look kid, I don't know what you're doing here, but this is a holy temple. Go cause trouble somewhere else."

"But I want to join your cult!"

Wilbur paused for a moment, opening his eyes to look at the intruder. The boy was staring back with an unbelievable level of earnestness.

"You— What?"

"Well, you're the Blood God's prophet, right? And you run his cult? I want to join."

That had not been the response Wilbur was expecting.

“How—” he sputtered, “How the fuck do you know who I am?”

“Well, it’s kind of obvious, innit?” he said, “This building has been abandoned for, what, 200 years or something? And now there’s rituals happening in here? The whole neighborhood’s already got their own theories.” The teen paused. “Also, one of the guards outside told me about you.”

Great. Apparently everyone knew about Wilbur’s presence, meaning there were already eyes on him. It gave him even less time to figure out what he was doing.

Wilbur eyed the teenager. “What’s your name?”

The kid smiled. “Oh, well, it’s Tommy, innit?”

Wilbur raised an eyebrow. “Your name is Tommy Innit?”

The teen paused. “Sure.”

“Tommy Innit,” Wilbur said, “Why the fuck would you want to join this cult?”

Tommy balked. “Wait, aren’t you supposed to recruit new believers? You’re doing a real shit job of convincing me to stay.”

“I am genuinely trying to understand why anyone would want to be here,” Wilbur said, glancing around at the near-ruins of the temple. Everywhere he looked seemed to reveal a new defect: a shattered skylight, a broken pew, yet more graffiti scrawled across the walls...

“I don’t know if you realize this, bitch,” Tommy said, “but *you’re* here.”

Wilbur tried to pretend that that wasn’t a good point. “That’s different,” he insisted, “I’m the Blood God’s prophet.”

Tommy snorted. “Yeah? Show me the evidence, dickhead.”

Wilbur bristled. “I don’t have to prove anything to you. Get out of my temple now before I make you leave.”

“*Your* temple?” Tommy scoffed, “You don’t look like the Blood God to me—”

Suddenly, the doors of the building creaked open. Without hesitating, Wilbur rushed forward, pulling Tommy behind the altar and covering the kid’s mouth.

For a moment, there was just silence. Then—

“What on earth are you doing?”

The voice sent a shot of dread straight to Wilbur’s stomach. They were caught. How the fuck was he supposed to lie his way out of this one? He could claim that he had simply heard Tommy and came to investigate, but these were the people who encouraged *human sacrifice*. He couldn’t just hand a kid over to them.

The only option was to play dumb and hope that Tommy stayed hidden. As Wilbur moved to reveal himself—

Tommy grabbed his wrist. The kid's eyes were wide as he shook his head frantically.

“What do you mean, ‘What am I doing?’” a second voice asked, “Did you seriously not hear anyone in here?”

Wilbur's heart did a strange jump. There were two guards. They hadn't been spotted.

He found himself thanking the Blood God that Tommy was here to stop him.

“You're just paranoid,” the first voice said, “Who even cares if someone's fucking around in here? It's a complete dump. You probably heard a raccoon or something.”

There was a pause. “Yeah... whatever,” the second voice conceded. A moment later, the doors to the temple closed again.

For a solid minute, neither Tommy nor Wilbur moved. Then, Tommy peeked his head over the altar.

“They're gone!” he chirped, sounding remarkably cheerful. The kid looked down at Wilbur and smiled.

Wilbur took a deep breath, standing up slowly and deliberately. “You need to get out of here.”

Tommy's face fell. “What? But I want to join! You have to let me join, that's how cults work!”

“No you—” Wilbur took a deep breath, “You can come back tomorrow. But if those guards find you here, they might... It's too dangerous for you right now.”

Tommy scoffed. “What are they going to do? Pray for my soul?”

Wilbur looked at the altar. His eyes felt stuck on the strips of red cloth, draping across the stone like blood. That could have been Eret's fate, *should* have been theirs by all measures. And if Wilbur didn't get Tommy out of here, it could be the kid's too.

His eyes shifted slightly, catching on the bracelets. *Fuck*. Wilbur still needed a place to hide them. But the temple would be undergoing renovations soon. There was no safe place in the building to stow them.

“Are you okay?” Tommy asked, looking genuinely concerned.

Wilbur could feel the dawning dread on his own face, the horror of what could have been and what might still happen. Instantly, he schooled his emotions.

There was still a bracelet on Tommy's wrist. It was just a straightforward gold chain, easily the simplest piece Eret had been wearing, but beautiful nonetheless.

Wilbur almost hit his face when the idea occurred to him. The solution was so obvious that it was stupid.

“Here,” he said, pushing the other three bracelets into Tommy’s hands.

“Oh, um, thanks!” Tommy said, fumbling slightly to keep the jewelry from slipping.

“If you leave now, you can keep it,” Wilbur said, grabbing the shoulder of Tommy’s shirt and pulling him towards the basement.

“Wait, what?” Tommy asked, already getting shoved down the stairs.

“You can keep the bracelets,” Wilbur repeated, lowering his voice. Hopefully Quackity and Eret were dead asleep. “Just don’t sell them for a few weeks, okay? I don’t want them popping up again too soon.”

“Why would I sell them?” Tommy asked, clasping the gold around his wrists with a confused look.

“Fine, you can keep them, it doesn’t matter,” Wilbur said, scanning the walls. Ugh, where was that broken window Tommy had crawled through? “Just do me a favor and don’t bring them within a mile of this temple ever again.”

Suddenly, a wave of cold air brushed against the back of Wilbur’s neck. Turning his head sharply, he found the broken window.

Gods, how did Tommy even fit through such a tiny opening? There was still glass around the edges, and it was at least a six-foot drop to the floor.

Fighting the urge to grumble, Wilbur took off his sweater, wrapping it over the worst of the broken glass.

“Alright. Up,” he said, looking back to Tommy. His fingers were locked together, ready to lift the kid through the exit.

Tommy still looked exceptionally confused. “What?”

“I’m helping you through the window. Go home.”

“Oh. Okay, I guess. But I’m coming back tomorrow to join your cult.”

Wilbur didn’t have the energy to argue, so he just nodded as he hoisted Tommy up and through the window.

Assuming the kid got away alright, this had worked out almost impossibly well. The bracelets would be gone, and Wilbur was helping a clearly poor teenager get some much-needed money. He was practically a saint for all of this, if you ignored the copious amounts of lying.

Tommy unwrapped the sweater from the glass and tossed it back to Wilbur. "Thanks!" he yelled, standing up and running down the alleyway, "See you tomorrow!"

Wilbur genuinely hoped that he would never see the kid again.

By the time Wilbur woke up the next morning, Tommy was already in the temple. Apparently, he had been sitting on the front steps when Bad arrived, annoying the guards.

"He wants to join!" the High Priest said, grinning cheerfully, "Isn't that great?"

It wasn't great. Wilbur wanted as few people involved in this scheme as possible, and now, less than 24 in, he already had Quackity, Eret, *and* Tommy to worry about. Fantastic. This was a great way to start his morning. On top of that, there were still guards outside the temple, because apparently Wilbur was "too important" to leave the premises without Bad. And there wasn't even any coffee, because the idiots who built this place 200 years ago never installed a kitchen.

The one silver lining was the bracelet situation: Bad had seemed sincerely surprised when he noticed them gone, but hadn't pressed the issue.

"I guess you were right about the jewelry," he said, looking carefully at Wilbur, "We'll get you some more for tonight's sacrifice."

So now Wilbur was stuck in an eternal cycle of hiding jewelry, but that was fine. At least he wasn't a corpse on the front lines. By that metric, this entire plan had been a startling success.

The first few weeks were pretty much the same. Wilbur would wake up, help fix some dilapidated portion of the temple, sacrifice a bunch of gold in front of the few locals who were curious enough to watch him, and then, after everyone went to bed, he'd pass the sacrifices off to Tommy, who would be waiting in the main room whether Wilbur wanted him there or not.

Sometimes, Bad would ask Wilbur to speak directly to the Blood God. He was the chosen prophet of a war deity, after all. It made sense that those in charge wanted his patron's explicit support when they started a new military campaign, straight from the prophet's mouth.

Wilbur would usually spout some vague mumbo-jumbo about "being blessed for battle" or "destined to win." Of course their army always won. They were the strongest military on the whole continent. It didn't take a genius to prophesize a victory, especially when the empire mainly just wanted to seize random city-states that had more merchants than soldiers.

Bad seemed completely enraptured by Wilbur's charade. Quackity and Eret, not so much. Tommy was somewhere in the middle.

Sure, the kid didn't seem particularly interested in the prophesying or the "communing with the Blood God," but he did like the rest of the rituals. In particular, every time Wilbur made a sacrifice, Tommy looked overjoyed.

"You're doing *fantastic*, big man," he said, grinning ear-to-ear, "The best ever. I'm sure the Blood God thinks this is just the coolest."

Wilbur had just finished another ritual, and really wasn't in the mood to be followed around by a child. "Thanks."

"So, what now?" Tommy asked, watching as Wilbur untied his religious robes and returned them to the wardrobe.

Wilbur glanced at Tommy. "What do you mean?"

"Well, we've got the rest of the evening. You want to hang out?"

Tommy had been quick to befriend both Quackity and Eret. It wasn't like the kid was around *all* of the time, constantly running off and reappearing at random, but whenever he helped out with the temple, it was with an endearing amount of bravado. Tommy's high energy was a good match for Quackity, and Eret just seemed excited to be alive, so they both humored the teen more than Wilbur did. It wasn't that he was trying to be standoffish. Wilbur was genuinely fine with Tommy, especially when the kid helped him smuggle out whatever sacrifices he needed to get rid of, but he just had too much to worry about already.

Wilbur looked around. Quackity and Eret had already gone back to their rooms for the night. There was no one to pawn Tommy off on.

He sighed. Alright. Fine. Babysitting duty it was then. It was probably his turn anyway.

"What do you want to talk about?" Wilbur asked, walking back out to the main room and sitting in one of the pews.

Tommy sat down in the row directly in front of him, leaning over the back of his seat. "Tell me about yourself! Like, what do you do in your spare time?"

Not a particularly exciting line of questioning, but Wilbur could play along. "I guess I play guitar? That's how I used to make most of my money before I got drafted."

Tommy's face lit up. "Could you play me something?"

Wilbur's fingers nearly twitched at the idea of touching an instrument again. It had only been a few weeks since he was busking on street corners, but it felt like an eternity.

"I wish I could," he said honestly, "but I don't have a guitar anymore."

Tommy's expression fell. "Why not?"

"Not a lot of time or space for music in the army," Wilbur said, trying not to sound too sour, "I mean, unless you count marching songs or the bugle that woke us up."

“But you’re not in the army anymore,” Tommy pointed out.

Wilbur almost laughed. “Tommy, I’m not allowed to leave the temple, and they don’t pay me. Where the fuck am I supposed to find a guitar?”

Tommy’s face fell into deep thought for a moment. “I guess that makes sense. Okay, next question: Do you have a family?”

Wilbur’s heart caught in his chest. He hadn’t thought about his parents since arriving at the temple. There was too much else to worry about.

“No,” he choked out, voice pained, “Not anymore.”

Tommy’s face grew sympathetic. For a moment, Wilbur was afraid that the kid was going to keep pressing. The wound was too fresh. If Wilbur had to think about it any longer, it might become real.

“Okay,” Tommy said, not offering any condolences or asking any clarifying questions. Wilbur felt immediate relief as the kid moved on. “What’s your favorite color?”

Wilbur successfully went three more days without thinking about his parents. He kept himself busy with renovations and rituals, letting Quackity and Tommy distract him. Even Eret was surprisingly good company, although they clearly did not want to be here anymore.

Things were okay. And then, all at once, they weren’t.

The dream had been mostly of his father. Wilbur couldn’t remember the specifics when he woke up, which made him feel even stupider for crying, but he could still feel the desperation of being left behind. Of reaching out, and having his hand slapped away. Of being betrayed.

Tears were streaming down Wilbur’s face. He needed fresh air, but he wasn’t even allowed to step outside for one fucking minute. So he did the next best thing.

With only a few hours until sunrise, he stumbled into the main room of the temple, doing his best to choke back his sobs. If there wasn’t fresh air, at least there was space.

Why hadn’t he been enough for his father? Sure, Wilbur was stubborn and argumentative, but he was still supposed to be *family*. He was his parents’ son. How would they even react if he showed back up on their doorstep? Would his father be upset that the war hadn’t killed him? Would his mother slam the door in his face?

Had they ever even loved him? What kind of love could it be, if they were willing to throw him out so easily?

Had he deserved it?

Wilbur wept, ugly and messy, as he collapsed in the middle of the room. He felt so desperately alone, and there wasn't anything he could do about it. So he did nothing at all, letting himself cry.

“Are you okay?”

Wilbur startled, head whipping up to find the source of the voice. But there was no one else in the room.

For a second, Wilbur thought that the Blood God might actually be speaking to him.

“Up here, Wilbur!” the voice, now recognizably Tommy’s, said.

Wilbur’s eyes shot up. There, above the doorway, was a decorative ledge, which Tommy was peering over.

“Tommy?” Wilbur asked, wiping his tears away, “What are you doing up there?”

Tommy looked a little embarrassed. “Um, I sleep up here.”

Wilbur stopped crying entirely. “*What?*”

“Honestly, it’s pretty nice!” Tommy insisted, “It’s like the top of a bunk bed, and I— Wait, no, what are you doing?”

Wilbur was climbing up to the ledge, doing his best to ignore the height below him. If he jumped off the table and got a good grip of the column, it really wasn’t hard to use the uneven wall like a pseudo-ladder.

“You don’t need to come up here!” Tommy insisted, but it was too late. Wilbur had already heaved himself onto the ledge.

If anything, he felt worse because of it. Tommy had a single blanket and pillow to sleep on. His shoes and bag were lined up neatly at the foot of his “bed.” That was it. Hell, soldiers on the front lines got better sleeping conditions than this.

Wilbur’s heart clenched. “How long have you been staying up here?”

Tommy looked remarkably sheepish. “Before all you guys moved in, I would just sleep in the beds downstairs whenever I was in the city. You guys use them now, which is fine, but I don’t really have anywhere else to stay...”

Wilbur blinked. “But I fixed the window. How did you get in?”

Tommy shrugged, pointing towards the ceiling. “One of the skylights is broken.”

The opening in question was a solid 15 feet higher than the ledge, and at least 30 feet from the ground, and... okay, Wilbur didn’t have time to unpack the horrors of *that* reality. He didn’t want to consider how many times Tommy could have slipped and fell, not when the same kid was apparently homeless because Wilbur accidentally stole his bed.

“You can’t sleep up here,” Wilbur said.

Tommy’s face twisted. “Come on, man, you’re really going to make me sleep on the streets?”

“No. No of course not,” Wilbur said, quickly pushing that image out of his head. “I stole your bed. You can have it back. At least for tonight.”

Tommy looked even more confused at that. “Then where will you sleep?”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ve got other places.”

Tommy looked at his miserable blanket and pillow, seeming to consider it for a second.

“Okay!” he said, climbing over the edge of the ledge and hopping to the ground. It took Wilbur significantly longer to get down.

A few minutes later, Wilbur pushed his way into Quackity’s room, waking the man almost immediately.

“Fuck, man, why are you in my bedroom?”

“Scoot over, I’m sleeping here,” Wilbur said, shoving Quackity to the side of the bed. The mattress wasn’t huge, but it could easily fit two people if they squeezed slightly.

“What the fuck happened to *your* bed?” Quackity groaned, slamming a pillow against Wilbur’s chest.

“Tommy’s sleeping in it,” Wilbur explained, dropping his head onto the pillow, “He’s homeless.”

“He’s— What?” Quackity said, looking significantly more awake. “Tommy—”

Quackity cut himself off suddenly, looking at Wilbur with an expression of realization.

“Were you crying?” he asked, scooting over slightly to give Wilbur a bit more space to breathe.

“No,” Wilbur lied, “Go to sleep. I’ll get Tommy his own bed tomorrow, and then you can have yours to yourself.”

Quackity didn’t say anything for a moment.

“You know, when you tricked me into joining your fucking cult scam, I didn’t think we were going to adopt a child too,” he said, “I mean, I love the kid, but I wasn’t expecting it.”

“We’re not adopting Tommy,” Wilbur insisted.

“Whatever you say, man,” Quackity said, closing his eyes. Wilbur felt his eyelids growing heavy too. “You’re famous for telling the truth, after all.”

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur's right. He's not adopting Tommy. Because Tommy is adopting him.

Tommy: "Do you have a family?"

Wilbur (visibly upset): "No..."

Tommy: "Hm. Interesting."

Genuinely, I had such a hard time writing this chapter. Writer's block is real and it is me trying to figure out how to pace Wilbur and Tommy's relationship. By this point in Tommy and Techno's fic, it was over.

I recently got 500 user subscribers on AO3! As a reward, I let my [Twitter](#) followers pick which fic to save from draft purgatory! [You can read the winner here!](#)

Thank you so much for reading! If you liked this chapter, consider leaving a comment (I cherish them like my own children)!

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Now that Tommy had his own bed, he spent a lot more time in the temple. Sure, the kid would still disappear randomly, but he always made sure to be back in time for meals.

Since the temple had no kitchen, none of the cultists had any way to cook. Instead, they were entirely dependent on whatever Bad happened to send over that day, with their dinners almost always being cold, meager, and underwhelming.

“What the fuck is this shit?” Tommy asked, looking down at his plate with obvious distaste. The two of them were sitting in Wilbur’s room, Tommy on the bed and Wilbur on a chair pulled up from the corner.

Wilbur took a bite out of his own meal. “It’s a baked potato.”

“This isn’t a baked potato!” Tommy protested, “There’s not even any butter, or spices! And it’s cold! I bet they didn’t even throw this shit in the oven long enough to cook it full-through!”

“Well, if you don’t want it, I’ll eat it,” Wilbur shrugged, taking another bite.

It was a lackluster threat. Since Tommy moved in a week ago, Wilbur had spent nearly every spare moment making sure the kid was okay, sharing meals and worrying when he came home late. Tommy was the only member of the temple who was allowed to leave the building, and in the moments when Wilbur wasn’t jealous of the kid’s freedom, he was nervous. What if something happened to Tommy out there? He wouldn’t be allowed to look for him. Wilbur wasn’t even allowed on the front steps.

“You’re fucking ridiculous,” Quackity had laughed, pulling Wilbur from the front window. “He’ll get home when he gets home. Trust me, street kids are tough as shit. He survived before you, and he’ll survive after you.”

Wilbur hadn’t liked that thought. Learning that Tommy was homeless had switched on some protective part of his brain, and he was having a hard time turning it off. He couldn’t stop thinking of all the possibilities: Had Tommy’s family abandoned him? Had they died? Had he run away? Had they kicked him out? Each option ate at Wilbur in an entirely new way.

Wilbur’s parents had betrayed him, which was bullshit, sure, but there had been build-up. He had been an adult. Tommy was still a kid. There was absolutely *no* reason that he should be alone.

“Wil?” Tommy asked, waving his hand in front of the man’s face, “You still with me, big man?”

Wilbur blinked. “Yeah. Yes, I’m— Shit. Sorry,” he stammered, quickly taking another bite of his potato, “Were you saying something?”

“Yeah. The food here is shit. You should tell Bad to bring us something better.”

Wilbur snorted. “Yeah, let’s go to the high priest and tell him his food sucks. Maybe if we’re lucky, he won’t slit our throats on the altar.”

Tommy balked. “What?”

Wilbur froze for half a moment. Tommy hadn’t been here when Eret... when Wilbur had almost...

“Nothing. Don’t worry about it. Just do me a favor and don’t mess with Bad.”

Tommy frowned, face shifting into something dark. Wilbur didn’t like the expression.

“Come on, Toms,” he said, shoving Tommy to the other side of the bed. The kid yelped, nearly falling off the edge as Wilbur plopped himself down. “Tell me a story.”

It had become a bit of a routine for the two of them, Tommy’s tall tales in the evening. The kid had a remarkably deep reserve of myths and legends, and he was always eager to ramble on to Wilbur about some god or hero.

Except tonight. Tonight, Tommy was just staring at Wilbur, practically vibrating with excitement.

“Uh—” Wilbur said, but he was quickly cut off.

“I have something for you,” Tommy interrupted, grinning wildly, “I wanted to wait until you were done with all your priestly duties or whatever so you could really enjoy it.”

Wilbur raised an eyebrow. “Okay? What is it?”

“Shut your eyes!” Tommy shouted, jumping up and sprinting out of the room.

Wilbur sat up a bit straighter in the bed. Tommy was probably running back to his own bedroom, which was still 70% storage boxes. The basement had three rooms and a bathroom, as well as the closet that Eret slept in. Wilbur had offered them one of the larger rooms, but they had turned it down. Though all the doors could be locked from the hallway, the closet was the only one that locked from the inside too, and Eret liked to sleep with it dead-bolted.

Tommy peeked out from behind the doorway. “Hey, I said shut your eyes, dickhead!”

Wilbur raised his hands in mock surrender, closing his eyes.

There were some footsteps and the sound of the mattress creaking, and then something was placed in Wilbur’s lap.

His heart jumped at the familiar weight, fingers curling around the object. Slowly, he opened his eyes.

It was a guitar. A real, honest-to-gods, guitar. Wilbur ran his fingers across the strings, playing a slightly out-of-tune chord. The warped sound was one of the best things he had ever heard.

He had gone weeks without hearing music, limited only to his own humming as he renovated the temple. Exactly once, a few days after Wilbur first arrived in the capital, a busker had sat in front of the temple. Wilbur had opened all the windows, desperate for the sound to fill the corners of what was beginning to feel like a prison. It hadn't lasted long. After just 30 minutes, Bad had arrived and shooed the busker away, making the temple quiet once again.

But now Wilbur had a guitar. And that changed *everything*.

"Do you like it?" Tommy asked.

"Do I—?" Wilbur laughed, more air than sound, "Tommy, I *love* it. I— How did you afford this?"

Tommy gave him a strange look. "Wilbur, you give me, like, a bucket of gold a day. I bought it from a random guy in the park."

Right. That made sense. Wilbur took in every detail of the instrument, from the scratches on its side to the multi-colored strings. He flipped it over. On the back, painted in various colors, were flowers and stars, sprinkled around the words "BIG MAN."

Something in Wilbur's heart swelled.

"I decorated that myself!" Tommy said, beaming with pride. "We can paint over it if you don't like it, but—"

"No!" Wilbur burst out, "No, I... I like it. I like it a lot. Thank you."

If possible, Tommy's smile grew even wider. "Pog."

Without thinking, Wilbur moved forward to hug Tommy, the guitar pressed tightly between their chests. The kid hugged him back without hesitation, patting the man gently.

Wilbur desperately wanted to show his gratitude, but strangely, the words wouldn't come to him. Instead, he just asked, "Do you want me to play something for you?"

"Of course I do, bitch!" Tommy said, "Why the fuck do you think I bought you a guitar?" The teen leaned slightly against Wilbur, looking down at the instrument. "Pick a song."

Wilbur's smile turned more fond as he started to tune the instrument. "Alright. This one's for you."

Tommy seemed to glow a little brighter with every song Wilbur sang for him, as though the notes were pumping vibrance straight into his veins. It was hard for Wilbur not to match the

energy.

Hours later, the songs grew softer as Tommy accidentally fell asleep in Wilbur's bed. Then, with a final strum, Wilbur fell asleep too.

Quackity had been almost as delighted as Wilbur to see the guitar.

"No, no, man, you don't understand," he said, gleefully plucking the strings, "I'm the fucking master at this shit. Hey, Eret! Listen to this!"

The instrument quickly embedded itself in the cultists' everyday routines. Quackity and Wilbur would trade off playing it throughout the day, making the renovations feel a bit easier. Tommy would occasionally steal it, trying without success to mimic the men before Wilbur stepped in and showed him where to place his fingers. Occasionally, Eret would try to teach them a song from their home country, leading Wilbur through the chords until the two of them managed something close.

But the biggest change was the religious ceremonies. Now, nearly every sacrifice and ritual was accompanied by music, high-energy and loud. Wilbur encouraged participants to clap their hands and stomp their feet, leading them in song as yet more gold was offered to the Blood God.

Surprisingly, it was a fairly popular addition. Now that there was music, the turnout at any given ritual rose from two or three curious neighbors to, at times, 10 whole people. A few had even registered with the temple, willing to throw in their lot with the new god.

Bad seemed pleased with this increase.

"I'll be honest," the High Priest confessed, smiling at Wilbur, "I didn't expect the music."

Wilbur did his best to smile back, lowering his guitar. "The Blood God loves music. It gets your blood pumping, you know?"

Bad nodded thoughtfully. "The people seem to like it. Your attendance numbers are up."

Wilbur chuckled. "It would have been a bit hard for them to go down."

The high priest didn't laugh at the joke. "I'm relieved, you know. I've put a lot of money and energy into this temple. If it fails, we might have to shut it back down."

Wilbur's felt his face fall. "What?"

"Well, you know," Bad said casually, "We've got limited resources. It's not worth keeping temples open if they're not maximizing reach. That's why I'm so relieved about your growth, though if it doesn't continue like this, we might still have to make some budget cuts."

Wilbur paused. “What do you mean, ‘*budget cuts*?’”

Bad scoffed. “Wilbur. I’m paying to keep *four* people housed and fed, and your congregation has, what, ten people in it? Maybe less? If you can’t manage to get enough members to offset your housing costs, we’ll have to find money elsewhere. Renovations are expensive, after all, and feeding all these extra mouths isn’t helping our bottom line.”

The High Priest looked at Wilbur, friendly and calculating. It scared the prophet to his core.

“Tommy would probably be the first to leave. He can go back to living wherever he was before. Then Quackity and Eret at the same time. Quackity will obviously be reenlisted, and Eret... well, I’d figure out something for them.”

Wilbur could picture these threats vividly. He could imagine Tommy, cold and hungry on the streets, and Quackity, bleeding and alone on the front lines. Eret... what would even happen to Eret, once they became a prisoner of war again? Would they end up on some new altar? Would their new jailers just kill them outright?

“But we’re not going to need to make those budget cuts, are we, Wilbur?” Bad smiled, “Because you’re going to get more members. Right?”

“Right,” Wilbur said weakly, looking down at his guitar. The idea of strumming it didn’t seem so appealing right now.

Bad’s smile widened. “I’m glad we’re on the same page,” he said cheerfully, “Well, you’d better get back to work! What renovations do you have planned for the rest of the day?”

Wilbur looked vacantly towards the walls, where some red vines were growing. “We’re going to remove those,” he said, pointing towards the plants, “We’ve gotten rid of most of the overgrowth, but those vines—”

Bad’s cheerful expression plummeted. “Don’t touch them,” he ordered.

The statement was too sudden for Wilbur to feel anything but startled. “What? Why?”

A much falser smile was plastered back onto the High Priest’s face. “I think they look nice. Besides, the Blood God likes red, right? Maybe he’ll appreciate them.”

Wilbur nodded slowly. “Okay,” he said, barely registering where the conversation had gone. His mind was still stuck on “budget cuts.”

“I’m sure your followers will be glad to do less work,” Bad laughed, walking towards the front doors, “Say hi to them for me!”

Wilbur kept nodding as Bad left the building. The prophet did his best not to panic.

“Are you okay?” Tommy asked, shoveling that day’s sacrifices into his pockets.

Wilbur, who was keeping lookout, clenched his jaw. It was long after sundown, but it was still possible that one of the guards might randomly wander in and see what Tommy was doing. “Of course I am. Why do you ask?”

“You’ve seemed kind of stressed all day,” Tommy shrugged, “Did Bad say something when he came in?”

Wilbur grimaced.

“He did, didn’t he!” Tommy shouted, pocketing the last golden ring, “That bitch. He should leave you guys alone! You’re doing a great job being a prophet!”

A small part of Wilbur wanted to keep all the temple’s problems to himself. Tommy was a kid. He shouldn’t have to worry about whether he’d have still a bed next week. But a larger part of Wilbur just needed to fucking vent.

“Bad told me that we need to get more followers,” Wilbur said.

Tommy straightened slightly at that. “Oh? That’s not so bad.”

Wilbur sighed, frustration seeping through his veins. “I don’t know how to get anyone else to join. I’m not even allowed to leave this stupid temple.”

“That’s fine,” Tommy insisted, “I can do whatever you need. I’ll go preach on street corners or something. Oh! And we can get my family to join!”

Wilbur froze. “You have a family?”

“Have I not told you about them?” Tommy asked, looking genuinely surprised, “I’ve definitely mentioned them to Big Q.”

Wilbur shook his head, trying to recognize the emotion in his chest.

“Well, of course I do!” Tommy said, “I’ve got the best fucking family ever, Wil, swear to the Blood God. They’re the coolest people alive!”

Something about this statement rubbed Wilbur the wrong way. “If you have a family, then why don’t you live with them?”

“Well, I haven’t seen them in almost a year,” Tommy said nonchalantly, “We’ve all been busy, you know?”

Anger flooded through Wilbur. The idea that Tommy’s family had been too “*busy*” to keep him housed and fed, that apparently they had better things to do than make sure their kid was safe, made him want to rip someone’s throat out.

Tommy pressed on. “Anyway, there’s three of us. I have a brother and...” The teen’s face slipped for a moment, as though he was choosing his words carefully. “... a father. And

they're the best ever! They make everyone else look like total bitches."

Wilbur didn't say anything. He wasn't sure if he could. He wanted to pull Tommy close and hug him. He wanted to track down the kid's family and fight them. Hell, while he was at it, he wanted to burn the temple to the ground and flee the country.

But instead, he watched as Tommy turned and walked towards the temple's front doors.

"I'll be back in a few hours!" the kid shouted over his shoulder.

Wilbur took a deep breath. "Okay. Knock on my door when you get back so I know you're home," he said, trying to keep his voice level.

The teen rolled his eyes, but he was still smiling. "Yeah, sure. Don't wait up for me, I might be gone a while!"

And with that, the temple doors closed behind Tommy. Wilbur comforted himself with the thought that the kid would be back by breakfast.

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur: "It's a baked potato."

Tommy, who has spent the last few centuries watching Techno perfect his baked potato recipe: "No it fucking isn't."

This week has been so fucking hectic for me. I had a ton of projects and midterms for college, BUT I also got a job lined up for after I graduate! So a positive week overall, if stressful. Hence the slightly shorter chapter.

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr!](#) Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur did his best to not think about Tommy's family. He tried to forget about the father that made his teenage son sleep in abandoned buildings and the brother who let his little sibling disappear for months on end.

Keyword was "tried." As he continued with the renovations, repainting all the bedrooms in the basement, an infinite stream of thoughts slipped through Wilbur's mind. He imagined childhood bedrooms and family vacations and everything crumbling down around Tommy. In his worst, most self-indulgent moments, Wilbur even imagined his own parents tossing Tommy out onto the streets. He had no other way to visualize the teen's family.

Wilbur was going to snap his fucking paintbrush in half. He wasn't sure if a bedroom wall had ever been painted with more rage, but Tommy's floor definitely had more red on it than it had the day before.

"It's cool, big man," Tommy grinned, "The paint splatters look kind of like blood! Very on brand, you know?"

The kid was in remarkably high spirits for someone who had been abandoned. Maybe it was because of all the new converts. Ever since Wilbur hinted about Bad's ultimatum, Tommy's street corner preaching had become the cult's saving grace. It felt like a few new people walked through the temple's front doors every day, and most of them came back again.

Honestly, Wilbur was half-convinced that Tommy was bribing the newcomers with recycled sacrifices. He was a bit peeved that he hadn't thought of the idea himself.

"Where the fuck did all these people come from?" Quackity asked, eyes scanning the pews. He, Wilbur, and Eret were standing in the temple's changing room, peeking out at the day's congregation.

Wilbur adjusted his religious robes. "Tommy."

"I didn't realize he was that fucking good," Quackity said, closing the door, "They're not going to need us anymore if he keeps this up."

Even as Eret laughed, Wilbur tensed slightly. He hadn't told his two... coworkers? Friends? Whatever they were, about Bad's threat. There was no point in worrying them about it, even if it meant listening to jokes that hit a bit too close to home.

"No wonder Tommy's been in such a good mood," Quackity continued, "I'd be pretty pumped too, if I pulled something like this off."

Eret shook their head. "I'm pretty sure he's happy because his family's visiting this week."

Wilbur tensed even more. “What?” he gasped, turning his head so quickly that it almost gave him whiplash.

Eret nodded, looking a little concerned by Wilbur's reaction. “Yeah. He said that some of his family members are going to be here in the next few days to check out the temple.”

Wilbur wanted to punch his hand through the fucking door, renovation budget be damned. How *dare* Tommy's family come waltzing back in the second the kid finally had some stability. He was going to tear their throats out on the altar. Shit, he was going to do it on the front steps, before they even reached the temple.

“Are you okay?” Eret asked. The concern on their face had grown significantly.

In the main room, the congregation began quieting. Wilbur cracked open the door.

In his own robes, mostly white with red sleeves, Tommy was standing by the altar, cleaning the surface and readying everything for the ritual.

He was such a good kid. Wilbur was going to rain hellfire on everyone who had ever dared to hurt him.

“I'm fine,” Wilbur said, mentally preparing himself for the ritual. And that was true, wasn't it? He had a few days before Tommy's family showed up. That was plenty of time to figure out how to keep them away.

Two unexpected men showed up the next morning.

That in itself wasn't strange. Random people showed up all the time at the temple, usually because they had questions about the Blood God or had taken a wrong turn trying to get to a different shrine. No. What was weird about these two men was how thoroughly out of place and dangerous both of them looked.

The first man, for some ungodly reason, had *pink* hair, as though he was part flamingo and had eaten too many shrimp. He was standing in clothes that looked about 300 years out-of-fashion, with a loose, billowy shirt, ridiculously high-waisted pants, and a potentially velvet red cape. He was also wearing a lot of plain, gold jewelry, as well as a few medals on his chest and an emerald earring. Most concerning, he was openly carrying an enchanted axe on his back, accompanied by a deeply chilling expression that shouted “*I am ready and willing to start mowing down cultists if necessary.*”

The man next to him looked notably more cheerful, though the sheathed sword at his hip made it clear that he was equally dangerous. He had blond hair and a much shorter frame, as well as the bulkiest green cloak Wilbur had ever seen. Honestly, everything the stranger was

wearing, down to his socks, was green: his atrociously ugly hat, his emerald necklace, the long robe under his cloak. The man had a brand and he was sticking to it.

Cautiously, Wilbur walked up to them. He had been caulking some particularly offensive cracks between the floor and the walls, but this clearly required his immediate attention.

“Can I help you?” he asked, making sure to keep his distance. If either of the strangers pulled out their weapons, Wilbur wanted time to run.

The pink-haired man looked around the temple, visibly unimpressed. “Is Tommy here?”

Wilbur felt stunned. He opened his mouth to answer, but before he could, a voice rang out from the basement stairs.

“Techno!” Tommy yelled, sprinting across the room. He was, for some reason, wearing his ceremonial robes, though the sea of fabric didn’t stop him from making it to the front door in record time. As soon as he could manage the jump, Tommy physically launched himself at the large man, clearly expecting to be caught. Opening his arms, the man took a step back, effortlessly cushioning the kid’s landing.

“Tommy,” the pink-haired stranger, Techno, said. The overwhelming fondness on his face made him unrecognizable from the man who had been standing there mere moments before. “Care to tell me what you’re doing here?”

“Phil!” Tommy gasped, ignoring Techno’s question completely in favor of throwing himself at the other stranger. This one stumbled back significantly, cloak flaring outward at the movement. He laughed good-naturedly as Tommy’s arms wrapped around him.

“Hello, mate,” Phil said, grinning as he ruffled Tommy’s hair, “It’s good to see you too.”

“No, no, don’t let him get out of answering this one, Phil,” Techno said, gently yanking the back of Tommy’s shirt like a kitten’s scruff.

Tommy blinked. “Out of which one?”

“You’re not playing innocent with me,” Techno said sternly, though there was still a hint of a smile on his face, “How long have you been in the Essempi?”

Tommy groaned. “Look, I’m sorry that I didn’t want to sit and watch you plant potatoes for another decade—”

“You told me you were going to hang out with Phil this year.”

“Are you kidding? He’s even more obsessed with Kristin than you are with Squid. It would have been worse than the fucking potatoes. Also, you better let go of my shirt or else I’m going to fucking bite you, bitch.”

Wilbur was not quite following the conversation. He vaguely recognized Squid as the name of some minor god of agriculture, but that didn’t exactly help things make sense.

Techno let go of Tommy's shirt, wrapping his arms around both the boy and Phil. For a moment, the three of them seemed entirely at peace, holding each other close with obvious care and relief.

Wilbur felt his heart tighten. He tried to picture his own parents holding him like that, but he was drawing a blank. His imagination just couldn't manage it.

After a few moments, Tommy pulled away, still looking completely overjoyed. "You'll never guess what I've been up to!" he gushed, grinning so wide that his eyes were almost closed.

Techno turned to look Wilbur up and down, then glanced at the rest of the temple. "I think we've got a pretty good guess. Did they give you those robes, or did you have to make them yourself?"

"Oh no, you do *not* get to tease me about my outfit. Not when you're dressed like a historical reenactor! I told you to wear something *inconspicuous*," Tommy insisted, yanking on Techno's cape.

"I'm just impressed that you know how to use that word," Techno said, pulling the fabric from the kid's hand.

It was at that moment that Wilbur finally regained some of his bearings.

"Tommy?" he asked, taking a step forward, "Who are these men?"

Everyone's attention suddenly snapped fully to Wilbur. He did his best not to feel like an intruder.

"Wilbur!" Tommy shouted, as though he genuinely hadn't noticed the man, "Meet Phil and Technoblade! They're my family! Phil and Techno, this is Wilbur, the Blood God's prophet."

Wilbur did his best to keep his expression level.

Apparently, his act was pretty convincing. Phil stepped forward, extending his hand. "It's nice to meet you, mate," he smiled, "It's always good to meet one of Tommy's friends."

Wilbur did his best to bite down his rage. "You're Tommy's dad?"

Phil audibly sputtered, turning his head towards Tommy. The kid was doing a very good job of not making eye contact with anyone, studying a crack in the ceiling with exceptional interest.

"Tommy?" Phil asked, clearly ready to elaborate his question.

Tommy looked back at Phil. "Yeah?"

"Have you been telling people that I'm your dad?"

The teenager rolled his eyes. "Phil, you can't possibly expect me to remember every little thing that I've ever said about you. That's an unreasonable expectation."

Wilbur's eyes darted to Techno. "So you're not Tommy's brother then?"

Techno shook his head. "Nah, unfortunately, I'm definitely his real brother."

"*Unfortunately?*" Tommy shrieked, trying with exceptionally little success to push Techno over. "Take that back right now!"

Techno looked around blankly. "Phil, do you hear something? I feel like there's a bug or something buzzin' near my ear."

"I am going to kill you," Tommy hissed, "And then I am going to get Lady Death to resurrect you so that I can kill you again!"

"What, I thought you were part of the Blood God's cult! Are you jumping ship already?" Techno asked, pushing Tommy's forehead away.

"It's not much of a temple, is it?" Phil asked, looking around carefully. Only then did he seem to remember who Wilbur was. "I mean, you've managed to make it quite nice. I'm sure everything will be great after you're done with the renovations."

It was truly taking the full extent of Wilbur's acting abilities to not strangle Tommy's not-dad. "Thanks," he gritted out.

"Hey, I've stayed in worse places," Tommy joked, somehow managing to elbow both Techno and Phil at the same time, "At least I'm not in a cage anymore, right?"

"You're not *what?*" Wilbur asked, voice verging on a shout.

"He's joking," Phil said, laughing nervously as he grabbed Tommy's shoulder.

"Is he?" Wilbur asked, "Because before he moved in here, he was living on the streets."

For a moment, everyone was stunned and quiet. Then—

"Tommy," Techno said, voice unreadable, "Is that true?"

"Well, would you look at the time!" Tommy shouted, "Wilbur, don't you have a ritual to prepare for? Or something?"

"The sacrifice isn't until 5pm, Tommy," Wilbur said, gritting the words through his teeth, "People aren't even going to start showing up until 4:30."

"And it's never too early to start getting ready!" Tommy said, nodding sagely.

"I think we got off on the wrong foot," Phil said quickly, "Why don't we go for a quick walk around the neighborhood and get some fresh air? Maybe me and Techno can buy you two lunch."

"I'm not allowed to leave the temple," Wilbur spit. To his frustration, Tommy was still standing next to the two men. Wilbur's self control was on the verge of snapping, his entire

being telling him to grab the kid and run.

Phil's expression dropped. "What?"

"A walk sounds great!" Tommy said, "The three of us can catch up! Just let me talk to Wilbur first! I'll meet both of you outside."

Phil and Techno both nodded, a bit too slowly to be enthusiastic. A moment later, the front doors closed behind them.

Tommy sighed, turning back towards the prophet. "Wil—"

"I don't like them," Wilbur said firmly.

Tommy grimaced. "Come on, give them a chance? Please? For me? They're my family—"

"What kind of family doesn't take care of their son? You were living in an *abandoned building*, Tommy! If they're so great, why didn't you stay with them? Fuck, why did Phil insist that he wasn't your father?"

Tommy pursed his lips. "We have a bit of a strange dynamic."

In better circumstances, Wilbur might have laughed. "Tommy, I don't want them around here. I just..."

They hurt you, he wanted to say. *They abandoned and betrayed you. At least my parents had a reason. What excuse do they have?*

But he couldn't manage those words. Instead, Wilbur simply said, "I don't trust them."

Tommy groaned. "Look, big man, whatever you're thinking, that's not what's happening, okay? Phil and Techno are really, *really* good to me. *I ditched them* for a little bit, not the other way round. If anything, you should go be protective of them!"

Wilbur still didn't like this at all, but before he could protest, Tommy continued.

"Look, I'm not asking you to do anything crazy. Just give them a chance, okay? It would mean a lot to me."

Wilbur wanted nothing more than to bar the temple doors and keep Tommy away from those men forever, but that would be counterproductive. At his core, Tommy was still half-wild, like a stray cat Wilbur was trying to win over. The kid would probably jump out a window the second there were no eyes on him if he was kept from seeing his family. Shit, Wilbur hadn't even gotten around to fixing the broken skylight that Tommy apparently liked climbing through.

Wilbur didn't trust those men, but for Tommy, he could play civil. After all, the last thing he wanted was either of them trying to steal the kid away.

“Fine,” Wilbur conceded, “But they can’t stay here. They have to find somewhere else to sleep until they leave.”

Tommy nodded eagerly, grinning from ear-to-ear. “Just wait, Wil!” he said, giving the prophet a hug, “You’re going to warm up to them. I know it.”

Wilbur sincerely doubted it. Against his better judgment, he prayed to the Blood God for strength.

Chapter End Notes

EDIT: OOPS I ACCIDENTALLY POSTED THIS AS THE CHAPTER SUMMARY
INSTEAD OF THE ENDNOTE SORRY SORRY FOR THE SPOILERS

Wilbur: (visibly holding back the urge to murder Techno and Phil)

Tommy: "So what do you guys think? New brother? New brother?"

(And in case it wasn't clear, Techno was MIA because he was busy fighting the Potato War against Squid Kid, the god of agriculture. Look, immortality gets boring after a while, okay?)

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr!](#) Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy returned a few hours later, Phil and Techno unfortunately still in tow.

Wilbur and Quackity had been in the temple's changing room when they heard the teen's voice. The two of them were getting ready for that afternoon's service, donning their robes and tuning the guitar. Eret was downstairs. For some reason, practically overnight, they had become steadfast in their refusal to participate in any sacrifices. Wilbur didn't push it. It made sense, considering everything.

"I can't believe the nerve of Tommy's fucking family," Wilbur snarled, yanking his sleeves down, "Shit, I don't even want to call them that. He's too good for them."

"I don't know," Quackity said, not making eye contact, "Having something is better than nothing at all."

Wilbur glanced at his friend for a moment. The man looked bitter and upset, staring into space with an unusual amount of frustration.

Right, Wilbur was going to shelve this topic for later. Three minutes before a ritual began was not the time to unpack whatever Quackity had going on.

Before Wilbur could think of a way to change the conversation, Tommy burst through the door.

"Sorry I'm late!" he grinned, grabbing his robes from the wardrobe and throwing them on, "Lost track of time."

"You're still doing the ritual today?" Quackity asked, looking a little surprised, "It's okay if you want to spend more time with your family—"

"No way, Big Q!" Tommy said, fumbling to tie his belt, "You guys would be lost without me! Besides, Phil and Techno wanted to watch a sacrifice anyway."

Oh great. Now, on top of everything else, now Wilbur had to perform for Tommy's shitty excuses for relatives. Perfect.

"They'd probably find it boring," Wilbur said, trying to sound disinterested.

Tommy scoffed. "Are you kidding? They *love* the Blood God. Like, *big* fans. They're really fucking excited to finally see a real sacrifice for him!"

Wilbur did his best to avoid looking like he wanted to die. If Tommy's family somehow blew his cover, he was genuinely going to just lay down on the altar and accept his fate.

“Let’s just get this over with,” Wilbur grumbled, opening the door without any more hesitation.

Wilbur had figured out a bit of a rhythm for these things. He’d start semi-somber, preaching some cliché sermon about blood or honor in battle or something. Then, he’d take out his guitar, leading the congregation in song. Slowly, bit by bit, he would start singing faster, urging everyone to raise their hands and stomp their feet. As soon as the congregation was wound up in a fervor, he’d get Tommy or Quackity to bring out the gold sacrifices.

Today was no different. Somewhere in the room, someone was crying. Another person was literally screaming, head in their hands as they sang the Blood God’s name. Yet another person had fainted, their husband crouching down to check on them. But none of that mattered. The only thing that was important was keeping the energy high.

“Almighty Blood God!” Wilbur sang, screaming to keep his voice above the howls and claps of the worshippers, “Accept our sacrifice! Protect us so that we may protect our people!”

And then, almost anti-climatically, Wilbur slammed the jewelry down on the altar. If they had still been doing human sacrifices, it probably would have been a lot more exciting, but the temple’s followers seemed happy enough without the spilled blood.

The frantic mania of the congregation began to wane as people sat down, tired from their worship. Wilbur picked up his guitar once more, strumming a gentler chord.

“Blood of our mothers, blood of our friends,” Wilbur sang, echoed slightly by some of the temple’s older members, *“From birth we are bloody, ‘til each of our ends. I fear not the blade of my enemy’s sword. The Blood God’s protection will be my reward.”*

Glancing up, Wilbur could see Phil and Techno sitting in the middle of the congregation. Phil looked confused out of his mind, constantly craning his neck to see what everyone else was doing. Techno’s gaze didn’t drift so far. If anything, it seemed locked on Tommy, who was standing next to Wilbur, singing along. Techno was dressed a lot more casually than he had been that morning, even covering most of his hair with a red beanie that looked suspiciously like one Wilbur owned.

The prophet continued the song. *“Blood of our fathers, blood of our men. He’ll love us tomorrow as he loved us then. I fear not the feeling of my final breath. The Blood God’s protection will watch me in death.”*

With that, Quackity opened the temple doors, signaling the end of the service. A couple of worshippers came up to thank Wilbur, shaking his hand and congratulating him on his wonderful sermon.

Within a few minutes, Techno and Phil were basically the only people still in the pews. Reluctantly, Wilbur let Tommy drag him towards the men.

“So, what did you think?” Tommy asked, beaming at his family, “Wasn’t that great?”

Phil still looked a little confused. “Uh... yeah. It was very... creative.”

“I thought it was good,” Techno said, “Less blood than I was expecting.”

Wilbur bristled. “We don’t do blood sacrifices. Blood is sacred to our god. Spilling it as part of a ritual is wasteful and sacrilegious.”

“Oh, I agree,” Techno said, “We are on the same page. Don’t worry about that. I’m just surprised.”

“Wilbur only sacrifices jewelry,” Tommy said, still beaming. The kid honestly looked a little drunk, swaying slightly from the excitement of the ritual. “And he sings a lot of songs. It’s *wonderful*.”

As much as Wilbur wanted to leave this conversation, it warmed his heart to hear Tommy so enthusiastic about the rituals. It was too bad that they were completely fake.

“Well, good job all around, I guess,” Phil said, expression warm as he turned to the prophet, “I can see why Tommy likes you so much, Wil.”

Flattery wasn’t going to get Phil anywhere. Wilbur didn’t smile as he responded.

“Thanks.”

Given that Wilbur wasn’t allowed to leave the temple, it was only a matter of time before Phil cornered him. So far, Wilbur had managed to expertly evade most of the man’s attempts at conversation, but now that it was day three, Tommy’s not-father was done messing around.

“Wilbur!” Phil shouted, waving cheerfully as he came up from the basement, “I need to talk to you!”

As part of the un-ending stream of renovations, Wilbur had been restoring the grimy tiles in the entryway. Though most of the temple had simple stone floors, some long-dead artist had made a mosaic by the front doors, depicting a literal river of blood. It was a bit gorey for Wilbur’s tastes, but it wasn’t like he could do anything to replace it.

Quackity and Tommy were washing the windows by the altar, too far away to hear any conversations by the entrance. Damn. Wilbur wouldn’t be able to pawn Phil off on one of them. At least, not without it being painfully obvious.

“What is it?” Wilbur grumbled, wishing the river of blood was real so he could drown himself in it.

Phil sat down on the other side of the mosaic, still smiling. “Me and Techno just wanted to thank you for looking after Tommy,” he said, “He’s been pulling a bit of a run-around on the two of us. I was visiting my girlfriend for a while, so Tommy apparently lied to Techno and said he was with me so he could go do his own thing without us worrying.”

Wilbur didn't want to hear any excuses. "I thought he had been abandoned." *I still think that.*

Phil looked slightly pained. "Me and Techno would never do something like that. Tommy's our family."

"Then why don't you let Tommy call you his father?"

Phil's smile faltered a bit more, but instead of pushing past the question, he paused to think about it for a moment.

"When I met Tommy... he was basically the same age as he is now. It feels kind of weird being called his dad when he never needed or wanted me to do any parenting. Besides, I had my own stuff to figure out when he found me. I wasn't in any position to raise anyone." Phil chuckled. "Honestly, sometimes Tommy feels more like the adult than I do."

Wilbur didn't like that description. Tommy was a *kid*, regardless of whatever baggage Phil had. That meant he needed to be taken care of. Why couldn't the man recognize that?

"None of us had families when we first met," Phil continued, "That's part why we're so weird from the outside. We just kind of found each other and made it work. Techno was orphaned when he was a kid, my mom gave me up as a baby, and, honestly, I'm not even sure that Tommy has a biological family. Sometimes it seems like he just spawned into existence."

Phil chuckled, as though there was some joke he was letting Wilbur in on. Wilbur didn't react at all, letting the conversation dry up into awkward silence.

Eventually, Phil cleared his throat. "Do you have a family?" he asked.

In the corner of the room, something clattered to the floor. In his attempt to wash the windows, Tommy had knocked a mostly empty bucket off the top of his ladder. The soapy liquid had splattered all over Quackity's pants, causing the man to start cursing at Tommy, but there was no need for Wilbur to step in. Despite the harsh words, the two of them were laughing.

But that was irrelevant. Wilbur had a question to answer.

"No," he admitted, thinking of his parents' faces. Could he even call them his parents anymore? "My family signed me up for the draft to get rid of me. If I didn't become a prophet, I'd be dead on the front lines by now. That seemed like a pretty clear sign that they wanted nothing to do with me."

Phil's face jolted to disbelief, then anger. "They *what?*"

Wilbur didn't say anything. Why had he shared that? He hadn't even told *Tommy* the specifics about his parents yet.

"We argued a lot," Wilbur clarified, "so they got rid of me."

For a moment, Phil just sat there, frozen. Then, he leaned forward. "Wilbur," Phil said, voice painfully serious, "What they did was completely and entirely wrong. You deserve a family

who will treat you better than that.”

For some reason, Phil’s reaction made Wilbur mad. Who the fuck did this man think he was, letting a teenager fend for himself and then thinking he could solve all of Wilbur’s problems?

Wilbur stood up suddenly, glaring down at Phil. “Stop it. You think I don’t know that already? I don’t give a fuck about what you think. You’re not Tommy’s father, and you’re not mine either. So don’t pretend that you care about what my parents did.”

And with that, Wilbur stormed off, practically running down the basement stairs. As he slammed his bedroom door behind him, he wished desperately that there was somewhere else for him to go.

Wilbur couldn’t fall asleep. Tommy had smuggled out the day’s sacrifices and made it back to bed in record time, but even knowing that the teen was safe hadn’t been enough to settle the prophet’s nerves.

So instead, he started cleaning the temple. At least it was something to do.

Careful to stay quiet, Wilbur swept the floors and wiped the pews. Usually the cleaning was split equally between all four of the temple’s inhabitants, but Wilbur was willing to take over the whole job if it meant he didn’t have to be alone with his own thoughts. Everyone would thank him for the lighter workload anyway.

Phil and Techno had been in town for almost a week, though Wilbur had no clue where they were staying. To be fair, he hadn’t asked. All he knew was that they’d show up every morning and hang around until evening. It gave Wilbur plenty of time to scrutinize their every move.

Frustratingly, they seemed deeply fond and caring towards Tommy. None of it made any sense. If they liked the kid so much and were so patient with him, laughing at his jokes and shrugging off his antics, then why had they failed to notice he was gone? Why weren’t they more like Wilbur’s parents?

As the hours stretched on, Wilbur worked his hands red, scrubbing the stone floors and scraping the wax drippings.

Eventually, even he had to admit that the main room was clean. Unless he managed to find a way up into the rafters, there wasn’t anything that needed immediate work.

Nothing, of course, except for Bad’s vines, which Wilbur had left untouched.

The red vines had completely overtaken the west wall of the temple, crawling up the surface and digging themselves in between the stones. The entire amalgamation reminded Wilbur of a leech, parasitically latching onto the temple, pressing itself into every crack and weakness.

The whole situation was no good. If Wilbur didn't do something about it, the plants might threaten the structure and integrity of the entire building. At the very least, they would grow too large for Wilbur to do anything about.

Vacantly, he considered lighting the entire wall on fire. It would be a lot more efficient than what he was about to do.

Taking out a knife, Wilbur started cutting and prying the vines from the wall. They seemed almost suctioned to the stone, clinging with little red follicles to every nook and crevice. It was exhausting work, heavy on Wilbur's already aching arms, but it felt good to make progress on something. So much was out of his control, but every time he threw another chunk of vine into his bucket, it was as though the air in the temple was becoming a bit more breathable.

Sighing slightly, Wilbur lowered himself onto his knees, trying to dislodge a particularly gnarly plant that was digging into the floor.

"What are you doing?"

Wilbur practically jumped out of his skin, head snapping up to meet Bad's gaze as he dropped his knife. The High Priest loomed over Wilbur, a scowl pressed firmly into his face. He looked beside himself with rage, white eyes unbelievably sharp and furious as he tightened his fists.

Wilbur looked back at his hand, fingers still wrapped around one of the red vines.

"The wall—" Wilbur started, but Bad interrupted him.

"I told you not to touch the vines," he hissed, grabbing Wilbur's wrist and yanking it back. Wilbur almost fell over at the sudden force, only kept upright by the vice grip Bad had on him.

"But they— They were going between the stones—"

"Do I look like I care about that?" Bad shouted, nails digging into Wilbur's wrist, "You're not allowed to touch them. Under *any* circumstances. Do you understand that?"

"I— Yes, sir."

But Bad's scowl didn't disappear. If anything, he seemed to be growing more angry by the second, fury pulsing from him in waves. Wilbur had never seen the High Priest so enraged. Even the man's frustration had been confined to small frowns and disappointed looks, perhaps a slight grimace at Quackity or a skeptical eyebrow at Tommy. This though, was something else. Something dangerous.

Wilbur was scared. On the ground, at the High Priest's complete mercy, there was no other way to put it. He was terrified.

Bad's nails were starting to draw blood. "If you *ever* try to remove these vines again, it will be the last mistake you and your men ever make. I will personally see to it that—"

“Don’t threaten him.”

At once, Bad dropped Wilbur’s wrist. Techno was standing a few feet away, face dangerously neutral. Under different circumstances, Wilbur might have described the man’s body language as relaxed, with his arms crossed and his weight on one leg, but there was something calculated in his eyes, as though he was deciding the best way to tear Bad’s heart from his chest.

If possible, Wilbur became even more terrified.

Techno’s cutthroat aura was not lost on Bad, but the High Priest seemed more composed than Wilbur as he gritted out his next words. “What did you say to me?”

“I said, don’t threaten him,” Techno repeated, voice still calm, “He’s just trying to fix up the temple, like you told him to.”

“Do you know who I am?” Bad said, voice shaking with anger.

“It doesn’t matter,” Techno said, “You don’t get to treat Wilbur like that.”

Bad’s eyes shot to Wilbur. “Prophet, get your men in line before I do it for you.”

Wilbur’s throat felt like it was closing up. Him? What power did he have in this situation? He couldn’t control Techno any more than he could control Bad, and everyone knew it. He had no power here. Perhaps he never had.

“T— Techno,” Wilbur stuttered, eyes still locked on Bad, “Please—”

Wilbur wasn’t sure what he was asking for, but Techno took it as his cue to kneel down beside him, hand firm and supportive on his shoulder. Gently, he lifted Wilbur’s arm, examining the bleeding scratches on his wrist.

“Do you treat all your prophets like this?” Techno asked, looking up at Bad.

The High Priests sputtered. “Most of my *prophets* know better than to disobey me.”

“I was under the impression that Wilbur served the Blood God and his followers, not you,” Techno said, gently lowering Wilbur’s wrist. His other hand was still on the prophet’s shoulder, holding him steady like an anchor.

“If he wants to keep serving anyone at all, he’ll do as he’s told,” Bad said, voice pure ice. His eyes shot to Wilbur again. “Don’t touch the vines again. I’ll know if you do.”

At that, the High Priest turned to leave, closing the temple doors behind him. For a few seconds, Wilbur could hear him talking to the guards outside, but he was thankfully gone quickly after.

Wilbur felt his entire body sag, fighting the urge to crumple onto the ground.

“Are you alright?” Techno asked, still kneeling.

No. No, he wasn't alright. Wilbur was supposed to be protecting everyone, supposed to be keeping this temple alive, but he kept fucking everything up. How was he supposed to keep the other cultists safe if he couldn't even clean a stupid wall without putting everything in jeopardy?

"Okay," Techno said, clearly realizing that he wasn't getting an answer, "We're going to find Tommy. Does that sound good?"

It sounded great. Wilbur nodded as he was helped to his feet, clearing his throat as he tried to find the right words.

"I'm sorry about that," Wilbur said, vacantly wrapping his fingers around his wrist. There were only beads of blood, but it still stung.

"Don't be," Techno said, corralling Wilbur towards the basement stairs, "That guy seems like a real piece of work."

As they walked down the steps, the past few minutes ran through Wilbur's head over and over again. He should have held his ground. He should have been more pliant. He should have done something, *anything*, to gain some semblance of control over the situation. But he hadn't. He had been frozen, completely unable to protect himself.

This was humiliating. Wilbur had been like a scolded child, too scared to stand up for himself or his cult the moment Bad got even slightly angry. If Techno hadn't stepped in, who knew what Bad might have threatened? Shit, who knew what Bad might have *done*? It wasn't like Wilbur would have been able to stop it.

Where had the High Priest even come from? Had he simply walked in at the worst possible time? Wilbur's luck had always been bad, but that was pretty shitty, even for him. The sun was only just beginning to rise.

Techno knocked on Tommy's bedroom door, knuckles rapping an unfamiliar pattern. The kid opened it a moment later, grinning.

"Technoblade!" he drawled, voice low, "How are you—"

Tommy's eyes caught on Wilbur almost immediately. The man could only imagine how pitiful he looked, slumped over and embarrassed. At least he hadn't started crying.

"Wil?" Tommy asked, voice uncharacteristically quiet, "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Toms," Wilbur said, unable to keep eye contact with the teen, "I just—"

"He needs a bit of cheering up, Tommy," Techno interrupted, pushing Wilbur forward, "I'll see if I can scrounge up breakfast for everyone. You said the farmer's market was open this morning, right?"

Tommy nodded. "Yeah, four blocks down if you turn right. A few of the vendors open early."

“Perfect.” Techno stepped away from the door, walking towards the stairs. “I’ll be back in half an hour.”

“See you then!” Tommy shouted back, closing his bedroom door a bit too loudly for how early it was in the morning.

Wilbur walked over to the edge of Tommy’s bed and sat down. A moment later, the kid was beside him.

“So, what’s wrong, big man?” he asked, elbowing Wilbur gently.

Despite everything, Wilbur still couldn’t burden anyone with this. Tommy was already doing so much, helping him run the temple and hide the sacrifices. Taking the full brunt of Bad’s threats was a small price to pay to keep the kid cheerful and calm.

“Don’t worry about it, Tommy,” Wilbur said, reaching out to squeeze the boy’s hand, “I’m just having a rough morning.”

Tommy took a deep breath. “Fine. I’ll ask Techno later. But *you*, Mr. Prophet, are going to go back to sleep.”

Wilbur startled slightly at that. “What?”

“Did you get any rest at all last night? Actually, wait, don’t answer that. It doesn’t matter. Lie down.” Tommy shoved Wilbur onto the bed, standing above him.

“Wait, Tommy—”

“I don’t want to hear it,” Tommy said, throwing a quilt over Wilbur. He made a big show of tucking the man in, topping his work off with yet another blanket. “You’re getting some rest if I have to barricade the door.”

“Tommy—” Wilbur tried again, but his voice wasn’t as forceful this time. Tommy’s bed, or rather, his cot, was surprisingly comfortable, and Wilbur was exhausted. Maybe he could just let this happen.

Content with his work, Tommy laid down next to Wilbur. The bed was barely a twin, so they had to squeeze slightly as he cozied himself under the blankets.

“Shut up, bitch,” Tommy said, eyes already closed, “I’m tired. Go back to sleep. When Techno’s done with breakfast, I’ll *consider* waking up.”

And honestly, warm and comfortable with Tommy nestled beside him, it was hard for Wilbur to not feel safe, as flimsy and fake as it may have been.

Carefully, Wilbur pulled his arms out from under the covers, wrapping them around Tommy. The kid seemed thrilled at this, pushing himself into Wilbur’s chest without even opening his eyes.

“Fine,” Wilbur whispered, letting himself drift slightly towards sleep, “If you insist.”

Chapter End Notes

Techno, watching a Blood God sacrifice that doesn't involve him getting stabbed in the chest: "I am a big supporter of this 👍👍"

And to those of you patiently waiting for 4/4 SBI family content, don't worry! Wilbur's anger is not going to hold out much longer. <3

If you want some of that family content in the meantime, check out this [Twinsduo one-shot](#) I recently posted. I'm really proud of it, and it should tide you over until Wilbur accepts his adoption.

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr](#)! Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

CONTENT WARNING: The last section of this chapter has a paragraph that could be interpreted as self-harm ideation. If you think that will affect you, please skip to the endnote after "As Wilbur slammed the jewelry down onto the altar..."

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was getting increasingly difficult to dislike Technoblade. At the bare minimum, Wilbur had no choice but to respect the man after the vine incident. Techno had stood up for him, and Wilbur genuinely owed him for it.

But it wasn't just that. It was the warm breakfasts Techno would make every morning, with his trademark side of hashbrowns. It was the jokes he'd crack while helping with renovations, smiling as he teased and humored Tommy. It was the way he glared at the guards out front, fiercely protective of people he barely knew. Fiercely protective of Wilbur, even.

Technoblade's presence was warm and witty and strong, always ready to step in and help the people he was loyal to. At some point, without asking or knowing about it, Wilbur had been added to that list. He couldn't bring himself to be upset about it.

Phil still sucked though.

It didn't matter how many times Tommy sat Wilbur down to explain that "Phil is not actually my dad and he definitely did not abandon me." Even if all that was true, Phil was still a neglectful asshole who was refusing to adopt Tommy.

Even more to the point, despite Tommy's protests, Phil *did* spend most of his time acting like a parent. He'd guide Tommy's hand during the renovations, demonstrating little tricks and techniques with exceptional patience. He was the one Techno and Tommy would turn to while bickering, urging him to settle their disputes. Phil would even scold Quackity when the man's antics went too far, though he just as quick to laugh.

These unintentional moments of parenthood extended to Wilbur. Annoyingly, the man would constantly check in to make sure the prophet was eating and sleeping enough. Whenever Wilbur made the mistake of looking upset, Phil would ask him what was wrong. Most infuriatingly, when Wilbur had accidentally sliced his hand open during renovations, Phil had flitted around him like a mother hen, desperate to clean and bandage the wound as quickly as possible. If Wilbur hadn't glared at him, Phil probably would have offered to kiss the injury too, to make it better.

It was as irritating as it was confusing. Phil might not be Tommy or Techno's father, but it certainly felt like he was trying to be Wilbur's.

Tonight, all three members of Tommy's family were sleeping in the boy's room. They had collected a few extra blankets and moved the pitiful excuse for a mattress to the floor, lying it horizontal as a sort of pillow.

Wilbur had tried to object, but Techno had put his foot down.

"It's already past curfew, Wil," he reasoned, a reassuring hand on the prophet's shoulder, "And I don't fancy getting mugged."

Wilbur was more than a bit skeptical of that last bit. Even if the man was wearing a lot of jewelry, Wilbur couldn't imagine a mugger stupid enough to challenge Technoblade.

"But you guys can't all sleep on that bed—" Wilbur tried, putting up a last protest.

"Wilbur. You've got to trust me when I say this: We have all slept in worse places. It's fine. The basement is at least as good as anything the army gave us."

Wilbur rarely considered the fact that Techno and Phil were veterans, even though they brought it up from time to time. He supposed that it made sense, given their ease around weapons and their visible strength.

He glanced at the medals on Techno's chest. There were so many of them. Wilbur had never done anything heroic. He had run the first moment he was able to, barely able to drag Quackity along with him. He was more a pragmatist than a coward, but he certainly wasn't honorable enough to deserve even one of those awards.

Not that it mattered. He had seen corpses come back from war covered in medals. Wilbur would rather be alive.

"I'm glad we've come to this agreement," Techno said, giving Wilbur's shoulder a final pat before turning away, "I'm going to bed."

For some reason, the issue didn't seem worth fighting. Maybe Wilbur was just tired. Maybe the thought of sending anyone out into the city streets this late left a bad taste in his mouth.

"You can grab some extra pillows from my room," Wilbur shouted, sitting down on one of the pews. Techno shot him a thumbs-up as he descended into the basement, leaving the prophet alone in the temple's main room.

Wilbur sighed. He had to savor moments like this, when the temple was empty and quiet. There was always someone turning to ask him something, some shout or hammering to break the building's peace. Now that Techno and Phil were always here, the main room was almost never empty, save for the absolute dead of night.

Even now, with everyone asleep or close to it, the temple was still filled with noises. The ceiling's wooden beams creaked and groaned. The windows, often left cracked open, whispered the sounds of the city streets, occasionally peppered with a dog's bark or an angry shout. And, of course, there was Wilbur's breathing, in and out slowly, as though simply keeping time would be enough to ease the pressure in his shoulders.

The vines had spread. Now, instead of being contained to one wall, they had started creeping in the direction of the altar. A few of the bolder strands had even taken to the floor, nearly tripping Wilbur on more than one occasion. Just looking at them always made him feel irritated, frustrated at the eyesore. Wilbur would often stay in that poisoned anger until Tommy came to distract him with some mercifully trivial question.

Honestly, most of the original cultists seemed a bit on edge these days. Eret was spending more and more time in their dingy closet, eyes often distant as they stared towards nothing. Quackity, too, was quicker to snap, though he usually apologized right after. Wilbur couldn't hold it against them, as much as he wanted to. The atmosphere just felt thicker lately, as though everyone was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Tommy, however, seemed completely immune to whatever bad nature was plaguing everyone. The same was true for Phil and Techno. If anything, the three of them seemed to grow increasingly pleasant with each passing day, more and more willing to pull the other cultists from their bad moods. Although, to be fair, anyone would seem cheerful compared to Wilbur right now. It had always been in his nature to brood, but his worries had never taken up so much of his active mind before.

If Wilbur failed, even for a moment, he would lose everything. He couldn't let himself forget that. His friends, his home, even his life were all between Bad's fingertips, waiting to be crushed, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Nothing but sit alone, watching as the vines crept ever-closer to the altar.

"Mind if I join you?"

Wilbur jumped slightly. Phil was standing right next to him, gesturing towards the pew.

Wilbur was tempted to say no, but he was going to bed in a few minutes anyway. Might as well humor Phil a bit.

"Do what you want," Wilbur shrugged, ignoring the way the man smiled at him.

Adjusting his cloak a bit, Phil lowered himself onto the pew, leaning back with an enviably casualness. His cloak landed a bit oddly, flaring out almost impossibly wide on either side.

"Why do you always wear that?" Wilbur asked.

Phil looked a bit confused. "Wear what?"

"Your cloak. Doesn't it get hot? I mean, I know that the temple's drafty, but is it really that bad?"

"Techno wears his cloak inside, sometimes," Phil pointed out, voice playful.

"Yeah, but that's *Techno*," Wilbur insisted, "He's... he's just like that, you know? And he takes it off when he's working on the renovations. You don't."

Phil chuckled for a moment, considering the observation. “Alright,” he said, “I’ll tell you why I always wear this cloak, if you answer a question for me first.”

Wilbur stiffened slightly. “Well, that depends on the question.”

“Nothing bad, I promise,” Phil smiled, “You just spend a lot evenings alone up here, after everyone else is already asleep. I was wondering what you do with all that free time.”

Wilbur sighed. “I don’t know. Think mostly. Get some fresh air.”

Phil snorted. “Fresh air? Mate, this entire temple smells like paint fumes right now.”

“Well, it’s the closest I can get,” Wilbur admitted, “Unless I want those guards out front to shove me back inside and get me in trouble.”

Phil’s face became more serious, his eyes dropping away for a second. “Right. Because you’re not allowed to leave the temple.”

“They don’t want me running,” Wilbur said, “I mean, technically me and Quackity are still enlisted in the army, so I’m pretty sure it would count as desertion if either of us left.”

“That’s such fucking bullshit,” Phil gritted out, “Them keeping you here. It’s fucking bullshit.”

Honestly, Wilbur appreciated someone just saying it outright. It was definitely fucking bullshit.

“Yeah, well there’s not much to do about it,” Wilbur said, trying to comfort himself, “So I’ll settle for what I’ve got. It could certainly be worse. This is definitely a step up from the front lines.”

Phil looked up at the skylights in the ceiling. “Do those things open?” he asked thoughtfully.

“Well, I mean, one of them’s still broken,” Wilbur pointed out, “I’m not sure about the rest of them. Tommy’s the only one who can really climb up there.”

“I think I can give him a run for his money,” Phil grinned, “What do you say? You want to go up on the roof? You can get some real fresh air up there.”

Wilbur looked at the skylight. It was at least 30 feet off the ground. “Phil, I don’t know how you expect me to get up there—”

“I’ll help you,” Phil interrupted.

Wilbur scoffed. “I don’t know what kind of ‘help’ is going to work that miracle.”

“Don’t sell me short,” Phil laughed, fiddling with the buttons on his cloak. Then, he paused for a second. “Wilbur,” Phil said, suddenly more serious, “I’m going to show you something, but you have to promise not to tell anyone about it, okay? Tommy and Techno already know, but I’d really prefer if we kept it between us.”

Wilbur nodded. Why not? He was already hiding so much from so many people. What was one more secret? “Sure.”

With a smile and a final button, Phil shed his cloak. At one, something black and overwhelming surged towards Wilbur, startling him so greatly that he shrunk back into his pew, arms held protectively in front of his face.

But nothing hit him.

“Wil,” Phil said, hand resting on the prophet's shoulder, “It’s okay. You can open your eyes.”

Slowly, Wilbur looked up towards Phil. At once, he stopped breathing.

Attached to Phil’s back was a set of magnificent black wings, spread out like the very image of divinity. Their glossy sheen caught the temple’s faint candlelight like glass, nearly sparkling as they shifted ever-so-slightly, proof that they were alive and real and part of the man in front of him.

Wilbur had never witnessed anything truly holy, but looking at these wings, he could almost understand why someone would pray. They were angelic, in the truest sense of the word.

“I can’t tell you how much grief these things have given me,” Phil said, stretching out his arms and wings slightly, “But they’ll do wonders getting us up to the roof.”

Suddenly, Wilbur realized that Phil was holding a hand out to him. Almost subconsciously, he reached out to grab it, letting the winged man pull him forward.

“Up we go!” Phil said cheerfully, yanking Wilbur a bit closer.

And then, with no further warning, the two of them shot up into the air, as easy as jumping. Phil bounced off one of the rafters slightly, a moment’s positioning shooting them directly through the broken skylight like an arrow through a bullseye.

At once, they were yards above the temple, overlooking the whole city. Without meaning too, Wilbur peeled slightly away from Phil, eyes drawn to the seemingly infinite sprawl of the capital. Before him, he could see everything: The temple of XD, looming over an entire neighborhood, the king’s castle, perched far off in the distance, the mismatched fleet of ships docked in the harbor.

And he could see the lights, flickering through windows and atop streetlamps. The city seemed to be the very reflection of the stars in the sky, a wonderful mess of constellations and human life.

It was Wilbur’s first breath of fresh air since stepping into the temple, and every part of it was marvelous.

Phil’s rise had been impossible quick, but he took his descent slower, gliding gently onto the sloped roof of the temple. The moment he released his passenger, Wilbur collapsed, legs shaking from sheer shock and exhilaration.

“Are you okay?” Phil asked, instantly crouching down with concern.

Wilbur started laughing before slapping his hand over his mouth. He needed to be more careful. The last thing he needed was for some guard below to hear him.

“You—” Wilbur whispered, looking up at Phil in wondrous disbelief, “You have *wings*.”

Phil nodded. “Yep.”

“And you can—! Phil. How did you get these? Where did they come from?”

“I was born with them,” the winged man said simply, “No one really knows why. Best we can figure out, some god probably blessed my family a few generations back and forgot about it. ‘Residual miracles,’ I think Tommy called it. I mean, unless I’m a demigod, and some deity *really* fucked up.”

Phil said the last bit as a joke, but Wilbur could easily believe that there was something beyond human in those wings.

“They’re fantastic,” he whispered, words slipping from his mouth unintentionally. Wilbur desperately wanted to run his fingers across the feathers, but he clenched his hands and held back.

“Thank you,” Phil smiled, “We should probably sit a little further up the roof, though. I don’t want either of us slipping off.”

Wilbur did as Phil suggested, stumbling only slightly on the uneven ground before situating himself at the roof’s peak. From here, the two of them could look out over the entire neighborhood, watching chimney smoke curl up towards the clouds.

For a moment, both men just sat in silence. Wilbur took a deep breath, relishing how crisp the midnight air was.

“I wanted to apologize,” Phil said suddenly.

Wilbur startled slightly. “For what?”

“I think I was too forward last time we talked. You were right. I don’t really know anything about you, and it wasn’t my place to tell you things about your own life like you didn’t already know them.”

Wilbur was surprised to hear that. His own father would have never admitted something like that in a million years.

“Thank you,” Wilbur said, a bit more quietly than he meant to. Phil smiled.

They sat in silence for a while longer, content to listen in on the city’s nighttime soundscape. Once or twice, Wilbur heard the guards stationed by the front door laugh, but other than that, there were no voices.

Eventually, Wilbur glanced back over at Phil. The man was staring up at the stars, something wistful on his face.

“Penny for your thoughts,” Wilbur offered, leaning back to get a better look at the sky.

Phil sighed. “I’m just thinking about my girlfriend, Kristin. Before Tommy asked me to come here, I was with her. I guess... I just miss her right now.”

Wilbur hummed in understanding. “What’s she like?”

Phil grinned at him, all lopsided and funny. Wilbur immediately got the sense that he had made a mistake.

“Oh, mate, where to start? She’s the most wonderful person that’s ever existed. She’s so smart and funny and cheerful and beautiful and, oh, XD above, she’s gorgeous. Takes the breath out of my lungs every time I look at her. And she can kick my ass, no question.”

Wilbur sputtered out a laugh. “Is that something you look for in women?”

“I’m just painting a picture,” Phil insisted, “But she’s good, you know? A genuinely good person. Loving her is like... it’s more than a breath of fresh air. Shit, it’s more than a lifetime of fresh air. Loving her is like having your chains fall away. It’s like coming home.” Phil’s wings twitched slightly. “It’s like *flying*. I don’t know how else to explain it.”

“I think you did a pretty good job,” Wilbur said, watching as Phil fell in love with the thought of Kristin all over again, “I’d love to meet her someday.”

“You will,” Phil said, so confidently that Wilbur believed him immediately, “She’ll introduce herself one way or another. I’ve been telling her about you.”

That made Wilbur feel a bit funny, though not necessarily in a bad way. Phil was writing home about him. He couldn’t help but hope that it was all good things.

“I’m looking forward to it,” Wilbur said.

Phil smiled, as though a particularly funny joke had just occurred to him. “I wouldn’t be too eager, if I were you.”

After that first night, going to the roof became a bit of a habit for Phil and Wilbur. Any time Wilbur had a particularly rough day, which was becoming more and more common, Phil would wait for everyone else to go to bed before launching the two of them into the sky.

It was a relief. Technically, even if they were caught, Wilbur was doing nothing wrong. He could always argue that he was still within the temple’s borders, just a few feet higher. Maybe Bad would even appreciate the loophole.

This evening, though, he wasn't on the roof. Instead, he was sprawled out on his basement bed, playing cards with Tommy and Techno.

For convenience's sake, Techno and Phil had started sleeping over in Tommy's room every night. Wilbur had been too nervous to ask Bad for any extra supplies, but in the end it didn't matter. Tommy's family had simply gone out and bought their own mattresses and pillows, making the most of the bedroom's tight space.

"Tommy," Techno said, "Stop cheating."

Tommy made a squawking noise, recoiling back. "I am *not* cheating! How dare you suggest that I would do something like that in a *temple*, of all places."

"You're not as subtle as you think you are," Techno said, moving around a few of the cards in his hands, "I saw you pick up two cards just now. The rule's one per turn."

Tommy grumbled, returning one of his cards to the middle of the deck. Wilbur couldn't help but smile at the attempt, even if it was all in vain. After all, Wilbur had stacked the deck to give himself most of the aces.

At that moment, Phil popped into the room, holding a small slip of paper.

"I've got another message from Kristin!" he said, beaming at the group in front of him.

"Wait, I know where this is going," Tommy groaned, rolling his eyes, "Here, Wil, let me save you some time: *'Oh, my name is Philza and my girlfriend Kristin is so beautiful and powerful and she helped hang the stars in the sky mimimimimi—'*"

"Be quiet, you little shit," Phil laughed, still smiling as he pushed Tommy to the side and sat down next to him, "Or else I'll tell Kristin what you just said."

Tommy's eyes widened. "No! Don't do that. Tell Kristin that I love her and that I always speak *very* highly of her."

"Careful, Phil," Wilbur said, placing a card down on the pile, "It sounds like Tommy's trying to steal your girlfriend."

"I could if I wanted to!" the kid insisted, "I am a very big and handsome man with many, many wives."

Everyone laughed a bit at that, teasing Tommy as Techno discarded two more of his cards. Phil was leaning over Tommy's shoulder, examining his hand and whispering a suggestion into his ear. With Wilbur laying back against the headboard, all four of them so close together on the full-sized mattress, it felt safe and domestic, almost like a fami—

Wilbur's heart stopped. At what point had their group become *this*? At what moment had he started feeling safe among these strangers?

He couldn't do this. He couldn't take this risk again. Not after his parents. Not when Bad was breathing down his neck. Everything was too dangerous. Too high a risk.

Wilbur didn't deserve this. Fuck, he didn't even *want* it.

"Wilbur? What's wrong?"

Tommy was looking at the prophet with complete concern, barely beating out the expressions on Techno and Phil's faces. Only then did Wilbur realize that his hands were trembling, cards shaking like leaves in the wind.

"I'm... I'm fine." Wilbur swallowed. "I just don't feel like playing anymore."

Tommy shrugged. "Oh. Okay, well, that's fine. What else should we do then?"

"No, I—" Wilbur bit his tongue. "I have a headache. I want to go to bed. I—" He put the cards down. "I want you to leave."

For a moment, no one moved. Then, slowly, Techno got to his feet.

"I didn't think you were losing *that* badly, Wilbur," he smiled, stepping towards the door. "Guess that means I win."

"What? No!" Tommy shouted, chasing Techno out, "I didn't forfeit! That means we tied! Techno! Techno, wait—!"

Phil was the last to rise, slower than the other two. When he got to the door, he turned back for a moment.

"Goodnight, Wilbur," he said, blowing out the lamp and closing the door behind him, "We'll see you tomorrow morning. Techno's going to make pancakes."

The moment he was alone, Wilbur crawled under the covers and curled up into a ball. He wasn't sure how to feel about the idea of breakfast.

As Wilbur slammed the jewelry down onto the altar, he tried to keep his legs steady. Bad was in the audience, right side, fourth row, by the windows, watching the prophet's every move. This was a ritual. Wilbur was used to being watched by the congregation, but for some reason, Bad's cold, white eyes felt so much heavier than anyone else's.

Today was special. There were more people packed into the temple than ever before, all eager to see the latest spectacle in the the Blood God's name. Wilbur had devised a special ceremony for that very purpose, yet another step in his plan to raise the congregation's membership numbers.

Technically, the ceremony had been Tommy's idea. He had repeatedly suggested some kind of formal swearing-in, a ritual promising the Blood God's protection to the temple's most loyal members.

"I know we're all members of his cult already," Tommy said, failing spectacularly to act casual, "But it'd be nice for it to be official, you know?"

"I'm not sure..." Wilbur said, hesitation clear in his voice.

"Please, Wilbur," Tommy pleaded, grabbing the prophet's wrist, "I just want all of you guys to be protected."

Wilbur had wanted to disagree, but the kid had looked so unbelievably eager about the idea. Wilbur was starting to think he'd cave to anything, as long as Tommy looked sad enough about it.

And so the day was here, with plenty of curious spectators. *The prophet has been avoiding blood sacrifices*, they all whispered, *but surely he'll do one today, right? To get the Blood God's favor?*

Now was the moment of truth. Tommy, Quackity, and Techno all stood before the altar, ready to be accepted into the Blood God's "chosen, protected few." Phil and Eret had both passed on the opportunity, though they were still sitting next to Bad in the pews, just as curious as everyone else.

"Followers!" Wilbur shouted, "The Blood God came to me, his prophet, in a vision! He asked me, please, protect the faithful! Let them know that I am here for them!"

He gestured to the three cultists in front of him. "Today, three of our most faithful will be accepted into the Blood God's chosen ranks! Technoblade, Quackity, and Tommy, all selected for their loyalty and dedication to our god! If any object to their ascension, speak now!"

The temple was deathly quiet. Glancing down at his friends, Wilbur could see the mix of emotions on their faces. Quackity looked, above all else, doubtful, though he was trying to stifle the expression. Techno was much calmer, betraying little emotion.

Tommy, however, looked openly thrilled. He grinned up at Wilbur, face full of love and triumph.

It made Wilbur feel more than a little guilty.

In that moment, the prophet's heart-rate skyrocketed. This... this wasn't enough. There wasn't enough spectacle. It wouldn't keep the congregation's attention.

There was a knife under the altar, kept in a priestly toolkit. Wilbur could grab it and slice open his own hand. He could bleed onto the altar and frame it as an offering. That would get everyone talking. Hell, it wouldn't even take much. He had already accidentally cut his palm open last week. If he peeled back Phil's carefully wrapped bandages and nicked the scabs, he could get it gushing again, easily. The blood would be memorable. It'd be a small price to pay for a good show.

Carefully, Wilbur reached under the altar, fingers wrapping around the knife's hilt. With a hesitance that he hoped looked revenant, he slowly raised the knife above the altar.

Without meaning to, Wilbur's eyes shot to Tommy again.

The boy looked frightened. No, that wasn't it. He looked *horrified*, like he could sense what Wilbur was about to do.

At once, Wilbur lowered the knife, letting it clatter against the tabletop. He glanced back out at the crowd.

Everyone was waiting for him to do something. Anything.

Wilbur cleared his throat. Anticlimactically, he shoved the knife to the side, pulling his bandaged palm away.

"Tommy," he declared, raising his unarmed hands in the direction of the boy, "Do you promise to follow the Blood God's will and protect his followers?"

Tommy smiled, relief clear in his eyes. "Of course I do."

Chapter End Notes

(If you skipped the last section, what happens is this: Wilbur is performing a ritual to officially put Tommy, Quackity, and Techno under the Blood God's (alleged) protection. During the ceremony, he briefly considers cutting his hand as part of a blood sacrifice to make the ritual more exciting, but he ultimately decides not to.)

It's for the best that Wilbur decided against that blood sacrifice. Can you imagine how panicked Tommy would have gotten?

(I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter. I am currently struggling with a terrible case of writer's block, so I am sorry for any delays.)

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr!](#) Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was two weeks later when Tommy found it.

He had been rifling through Wilbur's things, probably looking for a new sweater to steal. Techno had been peering over the kid's shoulder, pretending he wasn't interested in the prophet's things, while Wilbur and Phil sat idly on the bed, chatting half about renovations and half about nothing at all.

"Wil, what's this?" Tommy asked.

Wilbur looked up just in time to see Tommy reveal a flash of red.

Honestly, Wilbur hadn't even remembered that it was in there. The TNT was surprisingly forgettable, wrapped up in some old clothes at the bottom of his chest. When Bad had picked him up from the army camp, Wilbur had taken absolutely everything he had along with him.

That had included some TNT.

There were only a few sticks of it, hardly enough to break down a door, but it would surely be enough to blow a kid's arm off.

"Tommy, don't touch that," Wilbur said, rushing forward to snatch the explosives out of the teen's hands.

Techno beat him to it, plucking the TNT from his little brother's grip. "Is this all you've got?" he asked. It did frankly look a bit pitiful in Techno's fist.

"Give that back," Wilbur hissed, trying to swipe it away. He missed entirely, losing his chance as Techno raised the TNT over his head. Wilbur was not going to embarrass himself by trying to jump for it.

Tommy was, though. He started leaping immediately, looking ready to climb Techno if necessary.

"Yeah, bitch!" Tommy shouted, "Give it back!"

"I am not giving this to you, Tommy," Techno said, "I'm pretty sure that Wilbur likes having his bedroom in one piece."

"Techno," Wilbur said, holding his hand out. He tried to keep his voice firm. "Please give me that back."

Techno paused for a second before handing it over. After a moment's relief, Wilbur's tension shot up again, suddenly realizing what he was holding.

“Where on Earth did you get that from?” Phil asked, getting off the bed to take a better look at the TNT.

“They gave it to me in the army,” Wilbur said, “and then I took it with me.”

“You’ve been sleeping with explosives in your room this entire time?” Phil shouted, practically squawking at the idea.

“Why did they give you TNT?” Tommy asked, sounding genuinely curious.

“I don’t know, it was part of the mission my troop had, and I was in charge of handling the explosives.”

“You were supposed to be their demolition man, and this is all they gave you?” Techno asked, absolutely bewildered.

Wilbur bristled. “Well, I—”

“Did they even teach you how to set it off?” Phil questioned, looking very carefully at the way Wilbur was holding the explosives.’

Wilbur straightened his back. “I’ve got the basics down,” he insisted, “I mean, it’s not that complicated, right? You light the ends and then get far away.”

“With a fuse this short, you’re not getting very far,” Techno remarked, looking deeply unimpressed.

Wilbur hated this. He didn’t want to be in this conversation, caught somewhere between mockery and pity.

“It doesn’t matter!” Wilbur shouted, wrapping the TNT up in a random shirt and putting it back in the drawer Tommy had pulled it from, “I didn’t even remember I had it, okay?”

“It’s not safe to sleep with it in here—” Phil began, but Wilbur interrupted him.

“It’s not safe for me to sleep here at *all*, okay?” Wilbur’s voice was shaking a bit too much for comfort. “The TNT is the least of my problems!”

Wilbur regretted his words at once. Phil, Tommy, and Techno all looked at him in varying degrees of disbelief and concern, explosives momentarily forgotten.

“What do you mean, *‘It’s not safe for you to sleep here?’*” Tommy asked, taking a step towards Wilbur. “This is *our* temple.”

The prophet physically bit his tongue, trying to figure out his next words. “It’s not important —”

“If you’re in real danger, then of *course* it’s important,” Tommy said, voice surprisingly serious.

The statement startled Wilbur. Was he in *'real danger?'* He considered it for a moment. Wilbur was off the battlefield, sure, but Bad had trapped him in here with threats, keeping the prophet in line by reminding him how, at any moment, everything Wilbur held dear could be ripped from him. His safety, his friends, even his life. It was kind of fucked up.

Wilbur thought he had been strong for not telling Tommy about Bad, but now, he realized that he was being selfish. Tommy deserved to know the stakes of the game they were playing. He deserved to have the chance to walk away.

But Wilbur didn't want to give it to him. He didn't want to risk Tommy seeing the dangers and leaving him, taking his family in tow. Wilbur couldn't risk being alone.

He really was despicable.

"Tommy," Wilbur said, words slow and careful, "Do you trust me?"

Tommy frowned. "Of course I do, big man."

"Okay," Wilbur said, "Then I'm going to need you to keep trusting me."

Tommy's frown deepened. "I don't—"

"There are..." Wilbur's eyes darted to Techno and Phil, then to the ground, "... some issues. With the High Priest. But I'm dealing with them. Everything's going to be completely fine. I don't want you worrying about it."

Tommy didn't look like he believed Wilbur at all, glancing doubtfully at Techno and Phil. Neither man seemed to have any insight to give, so Tommy just turned back to Wilbur and nodded slowly.

"Okay, Wil," he said, "But you know, if things get bad, you can tell us, right? Or Quackity or Eret? We want to help you."

It was a nice sentiment. Shame Wilbur couldn't do anything with it.

"I know that, Tommy," Wilbur said, smiling at the kid, "Thank you."

Wilbur had hoped that that would be the end of it. It wasn't.

The next day, Techno and Phil waltzed into the temple, heaving a massive chest between them.

"What's in there?" Wilbur asked, walking over as they dropped it on the ground.

"It's for you!" Phil said, smiling wide.

Wilbur physically stopped short at that. He couldn't think of anything he really needed, let alone something that would warrant such a massive container.

"W— What?" he asked, less suave than he would have liked.

"Go ahead and open it," Techno said, nodding towards the present.

After a moment's hesitation, Wilbur stepped forward, unclasping the chest and swinging it open. His heart stopped instantly.

The entire thing was full of weapons. Swords, knives, axes, bows and arrows, TNT, shields—hell, there was even armor that looked suspiciously his size, glowing slightly with enchantments.

And it wasn't cheap stuff. Even aside from the magical pieces, everything appeared to be of impossibly high quality. On top of that, they were *beautiful*. Wilbur had never even considered that weapons could look so mesmerizing, but here was the evidence. Swords whose blades gleamed with unrecognizable hues, axes with masterpieces engraved on their heads, arrows made with feathers of every color— Even the TNT was better than what Wilbur had, obviously more sturdy and powerful.

"What do you think?" Phil asked, eagerly following Wilbur's eyes as the prophet took it all in.

At once Wilbur remembered where they were. If Bad walked in and saw all of this, he'd have their heads on a plate. Wilbur wasn't even allowed to *leave* the temple. Stocking it with weapons was certainly against the rules.

"You can't—" Wilbur said, closing the chest quickly, "You can't keep this here. This is a temple."

Techno snorted. "I doubt the Blood God is going to mind. He'd want his favorite prophet to be well protected, right?"

It wasn't meant to be a jab, but the statement made Wilbur's heart hiccup with guilt anyway.

"I was thinkin' we could start with sword fighting," Techno said, opening the chest again and pulling out a black, gleaming sword, "How's the balance feel on this one?"

Phil laughed. "You might want to start him off with something a bit lighter. Not everyone likes big weapons, Techno."

"It's not *that* big," Techno protested, even though the sword looked longer than Wilbur's entire arm, "I think it's a good option."

"Why don't you let him pick?" Phil suggested, turning Techno's attention back towards Wilbur.

"What would you prefer, Wil?" Techno said, presenting the sword to the prophet, "Does this seem like your style?"

Wilbur shook his head. “I don’t want any of it.”

“Don’t worry, Wilbur. It’s a gift. No strings attached, I promise.” Techno pressed the hilt into Wilbur’s palm. “Any of this, pick whatever you want, and we’ll teach you how to use it. We want you to be able to defend yourself.”

Wilbur felt more than a little patronized. He handed the sword back. “I can defend myself already.”

Techno gave Wilbur a flat look. “Wil.”

“I *can*, Techno,” Wilbur insisted, “I— I was in the army, okay? I—”

Images flashed in front of Wilbur’s eyes. He saw himself standing over an enemy soldier, blood on the ground mixing with Quackity’s. He remembered what it was like to kill a man, to turn away as the life bled out from a stranger.

The memory didn’t bother him as much as it used to.

“I don’t need you to protect me.”

Techno looked at Wilbur carefully, but before he could say anything, Phil interrupted.

“Of course not, mate,” he said, smiling wide, “We know you can protect yourself. We’re just trying to give you a bit of help in case you ever need it. Never hurts to have an extra edge or two.”

It didn’t make any sense. They didn’t know about Bad’s threats. Why would they care if Wilbur was able to defend himself or not?

“I don’t understand why it matters either way.”

“Wilbur,” Phil said, gifting the prophet a gentle smile, “We just want you to be safe.”

Wilbur shook his head. “Why?”

Phil’s face fell instantly. Wilbur didn’t turn to see what expression Techno was making.

“Because we *care* about you, Wilbur,” Phil said, unable to keep himself from stressing the word.

And then Phil didn’t say anything else, as though it could be that simple. As though it was something Wilbur should have expected.

The prophet took a deep breath, looking down at the chest. He moved some TNT to the side, picking up a small knife. It sparkled like diamonds, complete with a velvety hilt. It seemed to fit perfectly in his hand, as though someone had crafted it just for him.

“I don’t like wearing armor,” Wilbur said, sounding a bit more whiny than he intended.

“That’s fine,” Phil said, “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.”

And somehow, the last of Wilbur’s resistance broke at that. Just the fact that there was no real pressure, that the choices here were *his* without any lasting judgment or consequences, made it impossible to keep protesting.

“Alright,” he said, looking back towards his friends, “Teach me how to use everything.”

Techno and Phil spent the entire afternoon teaching Wilbur how to hold and use his knife, constantly correcting his footwork and posture to make sure he was standing steady. At some point, Tommy and Quackity joined in, sparring with axes in the middle of the room. Tommy was surprisingly competent with the weapon, walking Quackity through the basics as the two of them laughed.

It was actually kind of fun. Wilbur had expected the training to be like boot camp, harsh and exhausting, but Phil and Techno were both remarkably patient. Their corrections never felt angry or scolding, and if Wilbur was confused, they were always willing to walk him through it a second or third time.

And when he did something right, they both lit up, praising him as though he had achieved something significant. It felt a little silly, though Wilbur couldn’t help but smile back every time.

There were moments of embarrassment. Apparently, a good portion of what the army had taught him was half-assed, if not outright wrong, and Wilbur got knocked on his butt more than a couple times. But somehow, it didn’t demoralize him. Just a single smile from anyone in the room was enough to get him back on his feet, ready to try again.

As the evening drew nearer, Techno and Phil moved the chest to the temple’s changing room. They didn’t want anyone in the congregation snooping through it, after all. Wilbur also moved all the TNT to the back of the wardrobe, worried that Tommy would rifle through the chest and accidentally slash the explosives open or something. Was that how explosives worked? Wilbur wasn’t risking it.

That evening's ritual went well. Convert numbers were up that week. The temple was actually growing faster than any other religious group in the city, picking up new people almost every day.

That night in Wilbur’s room, Quackity snagged the prophet’s guitar, playing the absolute dumbest songs Wilbur had ever heard. In between melodies, Phil told stories of his travels, and of his girlfriend, Kristin. Techno went into insane detail about his farm, which apparently only grew potatoes. And Tommy, of course, was barely quiet for an instant, taking every opportunity to tell a joke and make Wilbur smile.

Tommy grew tired first, curling up against Wilbur in the man's bed. Within minutes, he was asleep.

"Out like a light," Quackity joked, "I wish I could pass out that fast."

"He's always been like this," Techno said, "He could literally be in the middle of a warzone, and as soon as you put him on flat ground, he's out cold."

Wilbur didn't like the mental image of Tommy somewhere dangerous, but with the kid so close, it was hard for such thoughts to feel real.

"Maybe we should all turn in for the night," Phil suggested, "I'm getting a bit tired myself."

Wilbur nodded, prodding Tommy slightly. The teen groaned, digging his face into the prophet's side to avoid getting up.

"Come on, Toms," Wilbur said, "Don't you want to sleep in your own bed?"

"Fuck off," Tommy mumbled, "I'm good here."

Somewhere in the room, Quackity snorted. Techno whispered something to Phil, who bit back a small laugh.

"Okay," Wilbur said, throwing some covers over the kid, "Fine. I'll sleep with Quackity. But tomorrow I'm going to want my bed back."

"Wait, how is this *my* problem now?" Quackity asked, "*You're* the big softie! Tommy acts like a tired puppy for one minute and now *I* have to share a bed?"

"Oh, shut up Quackity," Wilbur said, though there was no anger in his voice.

Quackity rolled his eyes. "There is no justice in this world," he said, leaning the guitar against the wall and walking out.

Wilbur stood up to follow him. "Goodnight, Tommy."

"Wait, Wilbur," Tommy whispered, grabbing the man's wrist. He looked a tad more awake now. "What about the sacrifices?"

Oh yeah. Wilbur hadn't gotten rid of the gold on the altar yet.

He ruffled the kid's hair slightly, lowering his voice so Phil and Techno couldn't hear. "Don't worry. I'll take care of that tonight. I'll see you in the morning, okay?"

Tommy seemed content with that answer, digging his cheek against the pillow and closing his eyes again.

Phil and Techno bid Wilbur a quick goodnight, watching as the prophet walked up the stairs into the temple's main room. Wilbur couldn't leave the building, sure, but it'd be easy enough to stow the sacrifices away until Tommy could smuggle the gold out tomorrow.

He hadn't expected to see Eret sitting in the pews.

It sounded bad, but Wilbur had hardly noticed they were missing all evening. Eret had been around, obviously. They were as trapped as Wilbur or Quackity, but somehow, over these past few weeks, they had faded into the background, even more locked off in their room than usual.

But still, they were Wilbur's friend, probably. Even more importantly, they were his responsibility.

"Hello Eret!" Wilbur said cheerfully, "What are you doing up so late?"

Eret was sitting hunched over, staring at the ground in front of them. The room was a pretty dark, with all the candles snuffed out, so it was a bit hard to make out their expression.

Wilbur sat down, slightly concerned now.

"Eret?" he asked, "Is everything okay?"

"Wilbur," they said, eyes still locked on the floor, "Why did you save me?"

Wilbur was a little startled by the question. He laughed, trying to keep his voice light. "As opposed to what? Literally murdering you myself? Believe it or not, I didn't have much of an option."

"Of course you did," Eret said, "We all have options."

Wilbur chuckled. "I'm not sure if you've realized, but I don't think that's true for the two of us. I think we're pretty locked in to our current situation right now."

"I don't think so," Eret said, "There's always a way out, if you look hard enough."

Wilbur paused, looking at Eret carefully. "What do you mean by that?"

At that moment, one of the temple doors swung open. Before Wilbur could realize what was happening, Bad walked in, flanked by four guards.

Wilbur stood up immediately, grabbing Eret's sleeve and yanking them to their feet. "Eret," he hissed, turning to look at them, "Get downstairs, and wake everybody up—"

Eret was looking directly at Wilbur now, face neutral and clear. At once, Wilbur's breathing stopped.

Their eyes were solid white. Instead of the familiar, peaceful blue that Wilbur had come to expect, Eret's eyes looked like chalk, dry and unnatural.

They looked like Bad's eyes.

Wilbur took a step back, breath shaking slightly. Then, a moment later, everything he felt was replaced with anger.

“You traitor—” he hissed, but before Wilbur could decide his next words, two guards yanked him back, slamming him against the floor. His head bounced against the stone, sending everything spinning as he tried to make sense of what was happening.

“Sorry, Wilbur,” Eret said, standing their ground, “But it was never meant to be.”

“I saved you!” Wilbur shouted, fury seeping from every word, “I gave you a home! I—”

A guard's foot slammed against Wilbur's neck, pinning him to the ground and forcing him to struggle for air. If possible, everything began spinning even harder.

“Eret,” Bad's voice said, shockingly cheerful for the situation at hand, “Go down to the basement and make sure no one comes up here. I'd like some time to talk with Wilbur one-on-one, if that's okay.”

“Of course,” Eret said.

Wilbur's hands clenched the ankle around his neck, trying to push it away, but he was too weak. Why was he always too weak?

“Let him up,” Bad said, “I need to talk with him.”

And like that, Wilbur could breathe again. For a few moments, he let himself lay on the floor, gasping desperately as the world began to right itself slightly.

“Take your time,” Bad said, “I want you to understand this conversation.”

A full minute later, Wilbur sat up. Bad was reclining in one of the pews, watching carefully as the prophet tried to collect himself. All four guards were still present, eyeing Wilbur like vultures.

“Eret told me about the weapons.” Bad's voice was calm, though there was a hidden edge to it. “They told me some of your new converts were arming you.”

Wilbur shook his head. “I—”

“Don't lie to me, Wilbur,” Bad said, “I wouldn't want my men to wake up any of the good people sleeping downstairs. Now, where are the weapons?”

Wilbur stilled for a moment. Then—

“In there,” he said, pointing to the changing room door. “It's all in one chest.”

Bad nodded his head towards the room. Two of the guards responded immediately, practically ripping the door open. A moment later, one of them stepped back out, sending Bad a thumbs up.

“Thank you for telling the truth, Wilbur,” Bad said, smiling, “See how easy things can be if we work together?”

Wilbur didn't say anything. He didn't think Bad wanted an answer.

"I just don't understand why you would do something like this," Bad said, sounding genuinely puzzled, "After all I gave you. You knew what would happen if you tried something like that."

"Look," Wilbur said, "I didn't—"

"Quiet," Bad growled. Wilbur shut up immediately.

One of the guards unsheathed his sword. Wilbur did his best not to flinch.

Bad stood up and took a few steps towards Wilbur. "What you did was wrong. We both recognize that. But you've been good these past few months. I'd hate to let such a small thing end our partnership." He leaned in, lowering his voice slightly. "But I'm going to need some confirmation to make sure you're not going to... do something stupid again."

Wilbur tried to swallow, but his mouth was too dry. "Like what?"

"Like how Eret proved it to me," Bad said, "I want you to swear yourself to my god."

Wilbur swallowed. "I— I'm already sworn to the Blood God, I can't just start following XD ___"

"Not XD, silly," Bad said, smiling. In that moment, he looked almost reverent. "I'm talking about the Egg."

Wilbur didn't even know where to begin with that. There was no god named "the Egg," at least as far as he knew.

"What?" he asked, completely bewildered.

Bad was still smiling. "I knew you'd be helpful from the moment I set eyes on you, Wilbur. You've got this kind of... charisma. People like you. You'd be a perfect priest for the Egg. And your congregation would follow you to him! I don't know if you realize this, Wilbur, but they're not here because of the Blood God. They're here because of *you*."

The flattery felt almost poisonous coming from Bad's mouth. On some level, it was exactly what Wilbur wanted to hear.

It terrified him.

Bad tilted his head. "I know you, and I can give you everything you want, Wilbur. All of the power you've ever dreamed of. And all you have to do is let me help you! You just have to leave this dingy temple behind, and join the Egg with me. You'd get more freedom, more money, more safety. Goodness, you could even bring your friends with you! Eret's already on our side! So how does that sound? That's something you'd want, right? To join the Egg?"

Wilbur took a shaky breath. "And what if I say no?"

Bad's smile froze. "No?" His face dropped. "Well, Wilbur, you never finished your military service. If I have no use for you, I guess I'd have no choice but to send you back." The High Priest paused for a second. "Or, I mean, I could just claim you made a break for it. We could easily have you executed as a deserter."

Wilbur felt as though his heart had been ripped from his own body. "You'd kill me?"

Bad shrugged, eyes cold. "Why wouldn't I? People die every day, Wilbur. What makes you special?"

Nothing. Nothing at all. Wilbur was a poor kid from a dead-end neighborhood who lied his way out of a death sentence. Everything special about him had been made up on the spot.

"Is my offer not enough? Sometimes it isn't. Being the High Priest means I meet a lot of martyr types." Bad seemed to think it over for a moment. "Alright, how about this? If you don't prove your loyalty, I'll kill your parents."

Wilbur jolted, not out of fear, but surprise. He hadn't even considered that his parents were connected to any of this.

Bad grinned, clearly thinking he had struck a nerve. "Sweet little couple, really. I haven't met them, obviously, but the notes I've read make them seem lovely. Shame about your father's right leg." Bad chuckled. "I wonder how he'd feel, knowing that his own son was the one who got him killed?"

How would they feel? At that moment, Wilbur realized that he didn't care. As horrible as it sounded, it made no difference to him if his parents were alive or dead.

"Do what you want with them," Wilbur said, trying to keep his voice calm.

Bad whistled. "That's awfully mean. They're your mom and dad!"

"They stopped being my mom and dad the second they signed me up for the draft," Wilbur growled, gritting out the words.

There was a pause as Bad studied Wilbur. "Alright then," he said, "I guess I'll just have to make do with the people already in this temple."

This time, when Wilbur jolted, it was out of pure terror.

"I was going to send Quackity back to the front lines. That still sounds good, right? And then Tommy... well, I suppose him and his family would make good sacrifices. The Temple of XD needs some excitement to get new converts," Bad mused, insultingly calm, "And I was just so inspired by the old Blood God rituals, you know? But we'd need some volunteers."

It had been horrible enough to see Eret, a complete stranger, strapped down to the altar. Just the image of Tommy or Phil or Techno, prettied up and led to slaughter, took every thought from Wilbur's mind. He genuinely couldn't think of anything more horrifying.

“Who do you think should go first?” Bad asked, tapping his chin like he was in genuine thought, “Maybe that older gentleman, Phil? That way his boys could watch. Of course, we wouldn’t want any of them making a scene. We’d have to take precautions to keep them quiet. Especially Tommy...”

Bad clapped his hands, looking absolutely delighted.

“Oh, I know! We could cut out his tongue! How does that sound?”

Words were completely lost to Wilbur. Instead, he just stared up at the High Priest in horror.

“And all the normal precautions, obviously. Slicing their ankles, cutting off their thumbs... And we’d have to stop feeding them for a week or two. Don’t want them having too much energy during the rituals.” Bad looked at Wilbur curiously. “Do you have any suggestions?”

How had Wilbur even gotten into this situation? He didn’t deserve to be the one leading this temple. He wasn’t as brave as Techno, or as clever as Quackity. He didn’t have as much tenacity as Tommy or as much wisdom as Phil. He was dumb and weak and was failing everyone. They were all going to die, and it was all his fault for not being smart enough to keep them safe.

“Well, I suppose I’m getting ahead of myself anyway. I’d only be forced to do this if you didn’t join the Egg.” Bad looked down at the prophet. “So what’s it going to be, Wilbur? Are you going to do what’s smart? I know you’re a bit stupid, but that doesn’t mean you have to be suicidal.”

There wasn’t really an option here, was there? Not if saying no meant losing the last few people Wilbur gave a damn about.

It sickened him to realize how helpless he was.

“Okay...” Wilbur said, “I’ll do whatever you want.”

Bad clapped his hands in delight. “Perfect! I knew you’d pick the right answer.”

It was stupid, but for some reason, Wilbur couldn’t stop thinking about Eret. Eret, who was standing in the basement right now. Eret, who was supposed to be his friend. Eret, who Wilbur had genuinely tried to protect.

“I’m so happy right now,” Bad said, smiling wide, “You know what? If we’re starting a new phase of our relationship, I think it’s best to be honest with each other. Does that sound like a good idea? I’ll even go first.” Bad cleared his throat. “For example, I know that you give Tommy the sacrifices every night.”

If possible, Wilbur’s blood ran even colder. Bad pressed on, not even looking at the so-called prophet as he continued talking.

“Eret told me weeks ago. But you want to know the truth, Wilbur?” Bad leaned in. “I never cared if you were real or not.” He shrugged. “Honestly, it’s probably better that you *are* fake. No deities to step in and make things more complicated. But we both saw each other for what

we really were, Wilbur: opportunities. I was your opportunity to get power and safety, and you were mine to spice up the religion in this city. In the end, didn't we both get what we wanted?"

"I guess we did," Wilbur said, fighting to keep his voice level.

"I'll be back tomorrow night," Bad said, patting Wilbur on the head. The prophet physically cringed away, but luckily, the High Priest didn't seem offended. "And then we can make your conversion official. There are just a few things I need to prepare first. Oh, and don't tell anyone about our little conversation, okay? You make Eret's job hard enough already, without forcing them to send me constant updates about your misbehavior."

For a second, Wilbur fantasized about snapping Bad's neck, but instead of trying anything like that, he just nodded.

At that, the High Priest left the temple, followed by his guards. Vacantly, Wilbur watched as they took the weapons chest with them.

He had 24 hours, at most, before he handed himself over to Bad's new god. Without getting up from the ground, Wilbur began to panic.

Chapter End Notes

Phil, Techno, and Tommy: "Hmmm, I'm not sure if Wilbur's safe rn."

Wilbur: *literally getting beat up and strangled by guards upstairs*

Genuinely, I do not know why this chapter is so long. I literally cut an entire scene from it and moved it to the next chapter, and it is still 5000 words.

ALSO CHECK OUT [THIS AWESOME FANART](#). And while you're at it, [THIS AWESOME FANART TOO](#). I love both of them so much.

And while you're checking things out, if you like SBI stories with a powerful Tommy who is subpar at communicating things (aka like this fic), check out my new oneshot, [The Grave That Held You](#). It has Necromancer!Tommy!!!!

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr](#)! Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

I posted a new chapter 2 days ago, so make sure you didn't miss that one! This one might be confusing otherwise.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil noticed Wilbur's new bruises immediately. It frankly ruined breakfast.

Techno was making hashbrowns and eggs, using the altar as a makeshift countertop. He walked dutifully between it and the fireplace in the corner, checking frequently on how things were cooking. Tommy was flitting around him, handing his brother more eggs or salt every time Techno held his hand out. Phil, Quackity, and Eret, meanwhile, were in the front pews, still half-asleep with rough voices. Tommy was bringing them their plates.

Eret was the first to turn and see Wilbur. They were wearing sunglasses.

Phil was the second.

"What happened?" he gasped, running over to Wilbur and cupping his face. Gently, the man began tilting the prophet's head back and forth, checking the new injuries.

Tommy immediately shot to attention, rushing to the prophet's side with a barely contained fury.

"Someone hurt Wilbur?" he growled, looking to Phil for answers.

Wilbur knew he looked bad. His cheek and neck were both bruised and discolored from the previous evening, and he hadn't slept a wink all night. He looked dead on his feet, and everyone was staring.

"Nothing happened," Wilbur muttered, "I fell down the stairs last night."

"We really do need to install some sort of light there," Eret hummed, taking a bite of Techno's hashbrowns, "It gets really dark."

"Bullshit," Techno said, walking over, "I know the signs of a fight when I see one. Who did this to you?"

"Nobody did," Wilbur said, pulling Phil's hands off his face, "I don't know why you guys are so convinced that something happened. I just fell down the stairs."

“It’s true,” Eret said, drawing everyone’s attention back towards them, “I heard someone fall down the stairs last night at around 3 a.m. Unless it was one of you...?”

No one said anything for a moment, all looking at each other. Then, Phil turned back to Wilbur, pursing his lips.

“Wilbur, if someone hurt you, you can tell us. We just want to help.”

“No one hurt me,” Wilbur insisted, taking a slight step back. “I swear. I’m just clumsy.”

At that, Quackity stood up, breakfast plate clattering onto the pew.

“Wilbur,” he said, face clenched into a forced neutrality, “I need to talk to you. Now.”

Wilbur blinked. “But—”

“*Now*, Wilbur,” Quackity gritted out.

Eret looked a little nervous. “Hey, if Wilbur doesn’t want to talk to you, you can’t—”

“I don’t care, Eret,” Quackity said. Without another word, he stepped forward, grabbed Wilbur’s wrist, and dragged him into the temple’s changing room. With a slam of the door, they were alone.

Sometime over the past day or two, the red vines that covered the temple’s walls had wormed their way into the changing room. They were only just barely beginning to creep in, but the sight still made Wilbur antsy.

“What the fuck is happened to you?” Quackity said, crossing his arms.

Wilbur took a deep breath. “I fell down the stairs—”

“No, no, I don’t want that bullshit you’re feeding everyone else. You told me when we started this that you weren’t going to lie to me about anything.”

“Well,” Wilbur said, “Technically I said that I wasn’t going to lie to you about seeing the Blood God—”

“Wilbur,” Quackity interrupted, “I need you to tell me the truth.”

The prophet took a deep breath. The two of them had been in it together since the beginning, hadn’t they?

“If we’re in danger,” Quackity said, voice low, “Then I deserve to know.”

Once the words began spilling from Wilbur’s mouth, he was unable to stop them.

“Bad’s men threw me to the ground and stepped on my throat last night to threaten me,” he confessed, “After you all went to bed. They were mad about the weapons. Eret snitched.”

Quackity turned, noticing the missing weapons chest for the first time. The man's face shifted from frustration to fear instantly.

"Fuck," he whispered, stepping away from where the chest should have been, "Do you think —"

"Bad told me if I don't join the cult of his new god, he'll kill all of us."

"Oh," Quackity said, "Okay. We can work with that."

The words startled Wilbur. "*What?*"

Quackity blinked. "Join the new cult. That's easy. We can do that."

Wilbur shook his head. "We can't just abandon everything we've built at this temple!"

"Why not?" Quackity asked, "The Blood God's not even real. We picked this at random. What difference does it make if we start worshiping someone else?"

In most ways, Quackity was right. They had no legitimate ties to the Blood God. It wasn't like anything was keeping them here other than the High Priest's guards. The smart option would have been to accept Bad's terms and live to fight another day.

Wilbur wasn't feeling too smart at the moment.

"It's— It's the principle of the thing! I built this entire cult from the ground up, and now he's going to rip it from me? This is *my* home! *My* people! I can't let him just win!"

"It's not '*letting him win*,' Wilbur," Quackity said, sounding completely bewildered, "It's called '*not getting executed by the crazy priest!*' It's not a loss if we all get to stay alive!"

Wilbur could hardly believe what he was hearing. The prophet might have been injured and scared and heavily sleep deprived and probably a bit concussed, but he knew that leaving the temple behind was not an option.

"Bad wants to take everything from me, and give it to his new god! The entire cult! I—" Wilbur's eyes grew cold. "I won't let him do that."

Wilbur could remember how weak he felt, at Bad's feet as the man threatened him. He could remember how scared the High Priest made him feel every time he took a single step out of line. Wilbur did not want to feel that helpless ever again. He'd rather feel nothing at all.

Quackity stiffened. "Woah. Woah. What's with that tone of voice? I don't think I like where this is going."

Wilbur didn't say anything. Instead, he walked over to the wardrobe and threw the doors open. Quickly pushing aside the ceremonial robes, he found what he was looking for.

Quackity's eyes widened when he saw the TNT.

“No,” he whispered, gaze locked on the explosives, “No, Wilbur, you can’t do this—”

“He’s going to destroy everything I’ve built, Quackity!” Wilbur hissed, spinning around to face his friend, “I made this cult. It was *me*. I can’t let him just destroy everything I earned!”

“Are you fucking listening to yourself right now?” Quackity asked, visibly horrified, “You’re giving a villain monologue! *‘If I can’t have you, no one can!’* You sound fucking unhinged!”

“*Bad’s* the unhinged one!” Wilbur shouted, raising his voice suddenly, “He’s the one trying to rob me blind! Give me one good reason why I should let him!”

“He—” Quackity stopped, trying to compose himself. “Wilbur. If you destroy this temple, they’re not just going to let you walk away. You’ll be executed for defiling a holy shrine, assuming the TNT doesn’t kill you first! And what about the rest of us? You think *Bad’s* just going to let me join his weird Egg militia? No! That fucker hates me! He’ll make sure I’m sent to the front fucking lines! I won’t make it to the end of the week!”

“You don’t understand,” Wilbur whispered.

Quackity’s face got angry. “Fine. You don’t care about either of us? What about Tommy?”

Wilbur stilled, but Quackity didn’t give him a chance to recover before he pressed on.

“I’m not the only one who’d be taking the fall with you. If you blow everything up, Tommy’s fucking dead. *Bad* will have him executed as punishment for this shitty dick-measuring contest you’re losing. Same with Phil and Techno. You might be the only one who’s making this choice, but *our* necks are on the chopping block too! Hell, *Bad’s* not even going to get the chance to kill them, is he? You’re going to blow them sky-fucking-high, along with our shitty temple!”

“I’ll get them out of the building first,” Wilbur said, “They’ll be fine. They can just go back to Techno’s farm.”

As much as it hurt to think about, Wilbur knew that Tommy, Phil, and Techno all had a home to return to. They would be safe there. Happy. They didn’t need Wilbur. They never had. They were a family.

Quackity scoffed. “Yeah right. Like those three would ever just leave you here.”

“They’ll leave if I tell them to. They trust me.”

“They shouldn’t.”

Wilbur stopped completely at that.

“And what about me, huh, Wilbur? Even if you get them out, *I’m* still not allowed to leave this temple! *I’m* still going to get blown to fucking bits, just like you?”

“So what then?” Wilbur growled, “You want me to just roll over? Bear my neck and ask *Bad* if I can kiss his fucking feet?”

Quackity shook his head. “You’re insane,” he said, “Look, I like what we’ve built here too, but we started this whole thing because we were trying *not* to die! That was *literally* our only goal! And now you want me to just watch as you kill all of us?”

“You didn’t start jackshit,” Wilbur said, “*I* founded this cult by myself. None of this is yours. I *let* you come with me.”

Quackity laughed. “You really *are* fucking insane! How the hell is *that* what you took away from this argument? It doesn’t fucking matter who founded the cult! We are getting wiped off the face of the Earth, and you’re speeding up the process!”

“And what’s your plan, Quackity? Are you going to betray me too? Just like Eret? Just like my parents?”

Quackity paused. Rage was seeping from his face.

“Is *that* what this is about? Your fucking *daddy issues*?” Quackity balled up his fists, raising them to his cheeks as he mockingly pretended to cry. ““Oh, poor Wilbur didn’t get enough love as a child, so now he gets to *murder* everyone!””

“Why can’t you understand, I’m going to get everyone out first—”

“And what about you, huh? Let’s say, by some literal, gods-given miracle, the rest of us all make it out and Bad doesn’t immediately track us down to execute us. Let’s say we all get to go live on Techno’s farm, like you made up in your fucking fantasies. *You’re* still going to be dead! I’m not letting you commit suicide!”

At that moment, Wilbur realized that he wasn’t going to be able to convince Quackity. They were at a complete standstill.

“You can’t go out there and repeat any of this to anyone,” Wilbur breathed, a hint of fear in his voice, “Eret will tell Bad, and then he’ll kill us.”

Quackity’s eyes widened again. For a moment, neither of them said anything.

"I can't stop you, can I?" Quackity eventually asked, more to himself than to Wilbur.

The prophet shook his head. "I'm doing this for us, Quackity. For the cult."

Quackity gaped at Wilbur, complete disbelief painted across his face. Then, after only a second of hesitation, the man stepped towards the door, not even looking at the prophet as he stormed out.

“Fuck you, Wilbur.”

The door slammed shut behind him.

Wilbur just stood there, unable to fully register the conversation they had just had. The wardrobe was still open. The prophet paused for another minute before closing it.

When he finally left the changing room, Tommy pounced towards Wilbur almost immediately.

“Is everything okay?” he asked, looking genuinely worried, “Quackity just stormed into the basement, but he wouldn’t tell us what you guys had been yelling about—”

“It’s fine,” Wilbur said, grabbing Tommy’s hands and squeezing them softly, “He just... We had a bit of a disagreement. I’ll give him some time to cool down, and then I’ll go talk to him again, okay?”

Tommy looked relieved at that. “Okay. Me and Techno made you some eggs, if you still want them. He tried to scramble them, but I forced him to make them sunny-side up.”

For some reason, Wilbur almost started crying at that. Sunny-side eggs were his favorite type. He didn’t realize that the kid knew that.

“Sure,” he said, blinking back tears, “That sounds great.”

A few hours later, long after breakfast was finished and cleaned up, Wilbur pulled Tommy aside.

“I’m going to go talk to Quackity,” Wilbur said, “But I need you to do me a favor while I’m gone.”

Tommy nodded. “Of course! Anything, big man.”

Wilbur took a deep breath. “I need you to distract Eret for me. I don’t want them to realize how long I’m gone for.”

Tommy made a strange face. “Why?”

“I...” Wilbur paused, parsing his words. “Me and Quackity are going to have a surprise for them. And I don’t want to have it spoiled.”

Tommy’s face lit up. “I love surprises!” he gushed, “You can count on me, Mr. Prophet, sir!”

The teen gave Wilbur a cheerful salute, immediately running off to go pester Eret.

Wilbur did his best not to feel guilty. Vacantly, he realized that he was never going to get a morning like that again. He’d never get to taste Techno’s famous hashbrowns, or listen to Tommy explain his previous night’s dreams. He’d never get to watch as Phil threw all the windows open, or laugh as Quackity showed up with the world’s worst bedhead shoved under his hat.

Those thoughts alone was almost enough to stop Wilbur outright. But he had already set his mind on what he needed to do.

Wilbur walked down to the basement. He didn’t want to apologize to Quackity, but maybe he could reason with him. Maybe a calmer conversation would finally help his friend understand.

He made it to Quackity's bedroom quickly. Knocking gently, Wilbur pushed the door open.

"Quackity?" he asked, "Is it okay if I—"

The room was dark. No one was there.

At that moment, a slight breeze tickled the back of Wilbur's neck.

He turned to see the basement window pried open. It was the same one Wilbur had hoisted Tommy through, all those months ago, still high off the ground and now freshly fixed. The curtains, sewn by Quackity himself, rippled in the breeze.

Underneath the exit were two boxes, placed against the wall like stairs.

When Tommy asked him about Quackity later that afternoon, Wilbur had a lie prepared.

"He's in his room," Wilbur said, not looking the kid in the eyes, "He said he doesn't want to talk to anyone right now. We should give him some space."

Tommy looked worried at that, but ultimately nodded. "Maybe we could play a card game or something after dinner to cheer him up!"

"Yeah," Wilbur said, "Maybe."

He was already lying about so much. Little things like this didn't even feel important anymore.

With Tommy distracting Eret, it had been easy to plant the explosives. The basement had four main support beams that served as cornerstones of the entire temple: One in the corner of Wilbur's room, one in Quackity's, one in Tommy's, and one in Eret's. The first three had been painfully easy to plant. No one would go in Wilbur or Quackity's rooms today, and Tommy's room was messy enough that shuffling stuff around to cover the TNT wasn't suspicious.

That only left Eret's closet. The door was, unsurprisingly, locked, but Wilbur couldn't have taken that chance anyway. He'd have to plant it tonight, when he was lighting all the other TNT. He'd figure out a way to open the door, one way or another.

The explosives were way better than what the army had given Wilbur. Techno had explained the day before that the fuses were long enough to give a few minutes of wiggle room for whoever lit them. It was plenty of time to run away. Or, more accurately, plenty of time to light three other sets of fuses.

After the job was done, Wilbur sat on the basement stairs and put his head in his hands.

He... he *had* to do this. Bad wasn't just going to leave him alone after he converted. The High Priest was going to keep wearing Wilbur down, over and over, raising the stakes of his threats, until Wilbur slipped up and the man finally decided to just get rid of him. Wilbur couldn't do that. He needed to stand his ground now, whatever the costs. At least, in some fucked up way, if he did this, the temple would still be his.

He was going to miss everyone so much.

"Wilbur? You good?"

Phil was standing at the top of the stairs, looking down with a concerned expression.

"Oh, hey Phil," Wilbur said, doing his best to smile, "Do you need something?"

"The ritual's going to start in about 20 minutes. I was just checking to make sure you were ready."

Shit. Wilbur had been so stressed about everything that he forgot about the daily sacrifice. He needed to pull himself together.

Carefully, Wilbur pushed himself to his feet, trying not to shake. "Sorry, I just lost track of time. Thank you, Phil."

"No problem." The man smiled, perhaps a little wider than usual. There was still obvious concern in his eyes. "Tommy's at the altar setting up the ceremony. We figured that Quackity probably wouldn't want to participate, so me and Techno have been doing his parts."

Wilbur's smile became a bit more genuine. "Thank you. I can't believe I almost missed the ritual."

Phil chuckled. "It's really nothing. You should see how many times me and Tommy have had to shake Techno out of his thoughts when he's focused on something. I swear, when he's on his farm, he can go all day without taking a break, and he doesn't even realize it!"

Wilbur could imagine the farm. He could picture Techno in the fields and Tommy in the animal pens. He could see Phil flying above it, free to soar without the city's eyes on him. Where would Wilbur be in that picture? What would his life have been like, if he had found them all a little sooner?

Wilbur wanted to tell Phil everything. He wanted the man to wrap him up in those giant, hidden wings and fly everyone off to somewhere safe. He wanted Phil's friendly, fatherly banter. He wanted to keep what he had managed to take.

But Wilbur had already made his choice.

"Phil, maybe after this, you and Tommy and Techno should go out to dinner or something. You've been cooped up here a lot recently. You guys deserve a nice night out."

Phil frowned. "But you wouldn't get to come with us, mate."

Wilbur felt his heart clench. “I know, I just thought—”

“Wil,” Phil said, putting his hand on Wilbur’s shoulder. The prophet was still standing a few steps below him on the stairs, so Phil had to lean down slightly. “We wouldn’t want to do something like that if you couldn’t come with us.”

Wilbur didn’t know what to say to that. It felt like he was losing his words more often these days.

“How long until the ritual?” he choked out, looking down at Phil’s shoes.

“Like, 15 to 20 minutes? Something like that. You’ve still got plenty of time,” Phil said, voice reassuring and cheerful as he led Wilbur up the last few stairs.

The temple was bustling. It was a Saturday afternoon, so it was more crowded than usual. If anyone else showed up, it’d probably be standing room only.

“Oh, Wilbur!” a voice called out, “Do you have a minute?”

As dread crept into his heart, Wilbur turned his head. Walking in their direction, surrounded by guards as he grinned and waved, was Bad.

Chapter End Notes

The difference between Wilbur and Quackity is that Wilbur is gaslight/gatekeep/girlbossing, and Quackity is mansplain/manipulate/malewifeing.

All of you in the comments wanted Wilbur to tell someone what was going on! Well congrats! I have given you what you wanted.

(Also, don't expect future chapters to come out this fast lol. I only wrote this so quickly to distract myself from how much my wisdom teeth hurt.)

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr!](#) Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Bad,” Wilbur said, trying not to sound too panicked. The High Priest was here. He was *here*, and that meant that Wilbur was out of time.

He could feel the fear on his own face. Bad had promised to come back tonight, sure, but it wasn’t even five o’clock yet. The sun was still bright in the sky. Wilbur had bet everything on the assumption that he would have a few more hours.

Phil looked between the two men for a moment before immediately stepping in front of Wilbur, blocking the High Priest’s path to him.

Bad paused in place, tilting his head. “Ah, I need to speak with your prophet for a moment,” he said cheerfully, trying to sidestep Phil.

Phil just shifted slightly, effortlessly mirroring Bad’s position. “Sorry,” he said, smile so fake that it looked painful, “Ceremony’s starting soon. He has to go get ready.”

“Well, then I’m sure he can tell me that himself,” Bad said, reaching for Phil’s shoulder to push him out of the way.

The instant before Bad’s hand brushed the green cloak, Phil’s arm shot out, gripping the High Priest’s wrist like a vice. Bad let out a small gasp of shock.

For a moment, no one moved. Bad just stood staring at Phil’s hand, stunned that someone had dared such a thing. His guards seemed equally surprised, frozen for several seconds before their hands moved to the hilts of their swords.

Bad’s threats had never left Wilbur’s mind, even for a single second, but now they felt realer than ever. He could imagine Phil struck down for his insolence, made to bleed out on the temple floor in front of everyone. In front of Wilbur, who was *out of time*.

“Wait!” Wilbur shouted, pushing past Phil and breaking the man’s grip. Now directly in front of Bad, the words came surprisingly easy. “He’s sorry. He just— You just startled him! Phil didn’t mean anything by it.”

Bad frowned, looking as though he was about to say something, but Wilbur pressed on.

“Phil,” he said, turning back towards his friend. The man in question looked caught between confusion and frustration, face anything but vague as he glared at the High Priest. “You’re sorry, right?”

Phil opened his mouth, surely ready to announce to the world that he was definitely not sorry and was going to keep standing his ground, but then he looked at Wilbur.

Wilbur knew he must have looked pitiful, but what else was there to do but beg?

“Please, Phil,” he whispered.

At once, the winged man’s face dropped into something more devastated, hesitating for a few moments before he finally settled on a reserved understanding.

“Whatever you say, Wilbur,” Phil said. His face was carefully schooled, though something sour still lingered in his eyes.

Wilbur physically sighed in relief.

“Whatever,” Bad said, nodding to his guards. They removed their hands from their hilts. “Just... run along. I need to speak to your prophet. Is there somewhere we can talk, Wilbur? Alone?”

“Um, the dressing room, I guess?” Wilbur said, hoping very much that Bad would not suggest the basement that was strapped with TNT.

“That’s fine,” Bad said, sending one last poisoned look at Phil before grabbing Wilbur’s arm and pulling him towards the sideroom.

Wilbur had hoped that the conversation might actually be alone, but two of Bad’s guards followed them in, looming in front of the door like trained dogs. It was probably good they were there. Wilbur might have done something desperate otherwise.

Every square inch of the room’s wallspace was covered in red vines, so thick and pulsing that Wilbur couldn’t make out any of the original stone. But he didn’t have time to focus on that, not when Bad was about to tighten the noose around his neck.

Why was the man even here? Had Eret snitched about something? Had Quackity—

All at once, Wilbur was filled with a new terror. Quackity was gone, and even worse, he was mad at Wilbur. Had he run to Bad in a desperate bid to stop the TNT? Had Wilbur been betrayed *again*?

An even more horrifying realization dawned on Wilbur. The temple was surrounded by guards. Had Quackity gotten caught?

“I’m sorry about Phil—” Wilbur started, only to be interrupted.

“Yeah, your cultists don’t know their place, what else is new?” Bad said, shockingly blasé, “I’m not letting that ruin our evening. We have more important things to talk about, Wilbur. Most of all, your *conversion*.”

Wilbur swallowed. “Um, right, yes, very excited and everything, but I need to do today’s ceremony first—”

“I was thinking,” Bad said, interrupting again, “All of your followers are going to convert to the Egg anyway, right? Just like you and Eret. So why not announce it here and now, during

the ritual? Make the sacrifice for the Egg instead of the Blood God? I mean, at least then the gold will *finally* be going towards something useful.”

Bad laughed. Wilbur couldn’t bring himself to do the same.

“So anyway,” Bad continued, “You can explain to your congregation why you love the Egg, convert in front of the whole temple, and then order them to do the same! Why bother waiting when we have everyone right here already? You can even get Quackity and Tommy up there, get them to convert with you!”

Wilbur took a deep breath, a million questions fighting their way to the front of his tongue. He had to ask. He had to know.

“Quackity…” he said, chest tightening at his former friend’s name.

Bad looked a little confused. “What about him?”

“Have…” Wilbur asked, trying to look casual. He was failing spectacularly. “... Have you seen him today?”

If anything, Bad looked more confused. “No? Should I have?”

Something akin to relief sparked in Wilbur’s chest. Quackity had abandoned him, yes, but he hadn’t betrayed Wilbur. He hadn’t gotten caught.

“Wilbur,” Bad pressed, “Is there something I should know about Quackity?”

The prophet quickly shook his head. “No, no, he— He’s just excited. I told him about the Egg and he wants to join. I thought... I thought maybe he would have found you to talk about it. Before I came upstairs.”

Bad looked overjoyed at that. “That’s great! Then he’ll definitely have to be up there with you tonight. He can convert right after you’re done, in front of everyone! The congregation likes him, right? If they see *both* of you join the Egg, they’ll be lining up to copy you!”

Wilbur tried to swallow. “I mean...” he started, “People like the Blood God. They might not be happy if we—”

“Wilbur,” Bad said, all cheerfulness immediately wiped from his face. The prophet stilled. “I’m not suggesting this. I’m ordering it.”

One of the guards by the door shifted slightly. Without even realizing what he was doing, Wilbur nodded.

“Perfect!” Bad said, clapping his hands in delight, “Well, I’ll leave you to it! It’s the most important day of your life, after all. You need to change into your robes and get ready. When you make the announcement, I’ll come up and take over, okay?”

Wilbur nodded again. “Okay,” he echoed, voice a bit higher than he meant it to be, “Sounds... good.”

“And congratulations!” Bad said, smiling on his way out the door, “May the Egg accept and bless you!”

The moment the door closed behind the High Priest, Wilbur fell to his knees, gasping for air. It felt like he was choking on his own lungs.

Bad was here for the conversion, but Wilbur... Wilbur couldn't execute his plan right *now*. Not when there were so many people in the temple. Not when Tommy and Techno and Phil would be caught in the crossfire. Shit, would he even be able to make it to the basement? Would that look too suspicious?

Wilbur leaned against the wardrobe, feeling shaky on his legs. He needed... he needed to get changed into his robes. No, he needed to escape the temple.

With a start, Wilbur realized what he was missing. He needed *help*. He didn't know what to do. He needed someone to grab his shoulders and promise that everything would be okay.

But Wilbur was alone. There was no one else in the changing room. Quackity had left him. Eret had betrayed him. And the idea of turning to someone new felt terrifying. Maybe his parents had been right in sending him away. Maybe he was just the type of person people had to abandon before he fucked everything up for them.

At least you've still got the Blood God, some snide corner of his brain mocked, *The only person who won't abandon you is imaginary*.

Wilbur wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. Instead, almost by instinct, he felt his hands clasp in prayer.

It was a low point, but what else did he have to lose? Wilbur was already watching everything slip through his fingers. What use was his dignity anymore? As the seconds flowed past, bringing him closer and closer to the horrifying reality outside of this little room, Wilbur realized that he had to talk to *someone*, set the record straight before everything he cared about was ripped from him, even if he was just speaking into open air. It wasn't like anyone else would listen. It wasn't like anyone else could *help*.

The TNT was already set up, and Wilbur didn't have the paper or ink to write a suicide note.

“Blood God,” Wilbur muttered, “I know you're not real, but—” He bit down. “I *really* wish you were. I'm... I'm scared. I'm scared of what Bad's about to do. Shit, I mean— I'm scared of what *I'm* about to do. I don't want everyone to die. I don't— I don't want to lose this. But if I don't do it myself, Bad will take it from me, and that's even worse. And I'd ask you for help, but you're not even *real*—”

“Wilbur?” A voice rang out from the doorway, soft and nervous. “Are you alright?”

Wilbur looked up. Standing before him was Tommy, concern painting every corner of the boy's face.

Relief and horror washed over Wilbur in equal measure. Tommy was here. Tommy was in danger, and it was all Wilbur's fault, but if nothing else, he was *here*.

"Tommy—" Wilbur said, but his voice broke completely before he could figure out his next word.

Eyes wide, Tommy ran to Wilbur, catching him and hugging him desperately as the prophet crumpled to the floor.

"Wil, woah, woah," Tommy said, doing his best to get Wilbur back onto his feet, "What's wrong? Tell me what's wrong."

"You need—" Wilbur gasped, shaking his head, "You need to leave the temple. You can't be here."

"What?" Tommy asked, pulling back slightly to get a better look at the prophet, "Wil, what the fuck are you talking about?"

"You have to go," Wilbur said, firmer this time, "You need to take Techno and Phil, and—and you need to run. You need to get as far away from this temple as you can. You can go back to Techno's farm and pretend you never met me."

Tommy looked completely bewildered and more than a little hurt. "Wilbur, no. We're not going to leave you here. If something's wrong, just tell me. We'll help you. I promise. We can fix things, or we can take you with us... Whatever you want."

Wilbur wished that could be true. He wished he could just run away with Tommy, confident that Phil and Techno would protect their trail and follow them quickly. He wished he could be safe again, even if it was just for a moment.

But that wasn't a possibility. Wilbur was wrapped too tightly around Bad's fingers. Even if everyone else managed to escape, he was doomed.

Wilbur looked at the kid in front of him. If he couldn't save himself, he'd do the next best thing.

"Tommy," he said, trying to keep his voice from shaking, "Please. Leave the temple. Just for a couple of hours."

"Wil," Tommy said, hands moving to Wilbur's shoulders, "I don't know what's going on, but I'm not leaving you when you're like this. Something is clearly wrong, and I'm not going to even *consider* letting you out of my sight until you tell me what it is."

They were wasting time they didn't have. Tommy needed to go, and he needed to take as many people as possible with him before Wilbur blew the entire temple sky-high.

With a sinking feeling, Wilbur realized that he already knew how to make Tommy leave.

"Tommy," Wilbur said, "I need to tell you something serious."

“What is it?” Tommy asked, voice painfully encouraging.

Wilbur dug his nails into his palms. For a moment, he just allowed the silence to linger, savoring the obvious care and compassion on Tommy's face. It would be the last time the boy ever looked at him that way.

“Wilbur,” Tommy said, moving to squeeze the prophet's hand. Wilbur took it, clutching on almost desperately. “It's okay. You can tell me anything. I won't judge you.”

Wilbur took a deep breath. “I've never actually talked to the Blood God,” he whispered, “I made it all up.”

Tommy blinked. “Okay.”

The reaction was so lackluster that Wilbur physically dropped the kid's hand. “I— Tommy, you don't understand,” he insisted, “I'm not a real prophet. This entire cult is a complete sham. Everything was a lie.”

“Well,” Tommy said, looking at Wilbur curiously, “I mean, yeah. Sure.”

“*Sure?*” Wilbur was absolutely taken aback by how casually Tommy was acting. He was expecting the boy to yell, to curse, to storm out and abandon him, just like Wilbur deserved. But he wasn't. The teen didn't seem to be reacting at all. “Tommy, I'm a total fraud. How are you not angry at me?”

Tommy shrugged. “I'm kind of an expert on the Blood God,” he said, a hint of a smile on his face, “It wasn't that hard to tell you were faking some things.”

Wilbur felt so stunned that he forgot he was supposed to be scared.

“You mean... you *knew*? The entire time? ”

“Well, yeah, pretty much,” Tommy said, still unbearably relaxed, “You didn't exactly do a lot of research before starting this thing.”

Slowly, a realization began to creep over Wilbur. “Tommy,” he said, fear tingeing his voice, “Does anyone else know?”

“Well,” Tommy said, looking a bit sheepish, “I mean, obviously I told Phil and Techno—”

If the teen said anything after that, Wilbur wasn't listening. He had spent all this time lying and hiding for nothing. Wilbur was a fraud, and even worse, he wasn't a convincing one.

“Wait,” Wilbur started, “So you knew—” Tommy nodded. “And Techno and Phil knew.” Another nod. “And Quackity knew. And Eret and Bad knew.” Wilbur ran his hand through his hair. “Did I manage to trick *anyone*?”

“Well,” Tommy said, nodding towards the door, “I think the people out there are pretty convinced.”

Right. The congregation. Wilbur was supposed to perform a ritual in a few minutes, converting in front of the entire temple. He was supposed to go down to the basement, taking everything and everyone with him.

At once, all the fear rushed back, paralyzing Wilbur in place.

“Also, I wouldn’t say you’re a *complete* fraud,” Tommy said, not noticing how Wilbur had stiffened, “You kind of made up the prophet thing, sure, but you’re genuinely a priest. You lead all those sacrifices and you pray and stuff. Seems at least a little bit legit to me.”

Wilbur didn’t say anything. His hands were shaking. When had they started shaking?

“Was that what you were so scared about, Wil? Because I don’t care about any of that,” Tommy insisted, “I promise, I’m not mad at you. I’m not going to leave because of this, or anything dumb like that.”

Wilbur felt tears roll down his cheeks. He was a failure. He had ruined everything, and now Tommy was going to die because of it. He couldn’t even save one kid.

“Don’t worry, Wilbur,” Tommy said, gentle and comforting. He rubbed his hand up and down Wilbur’s back in slow circles. “You’re safe. You’re protected by the Blood God, remember? If Bad tries anything, you’ll be okay.”

And, without even registering what he was doing, Wilbur began to laugh. Pulling back from Tommy, the prophet literally doubled over, feeling absolutely manic as the kid frowned at him.

“What’s so funny?” the teen asked.

“We’re not getting saved by the Blood God, Tommy,” Wilbur laughed, more than a little hysterical, “We’re fucked! Absolutely fucked!”

Tommy frowned, looking outright offended. “Why wouldn’t he save us?”

Wilbur couldn’t hold back a scoff as he wiped the tears from his face. “Because, Tommy, he’s not *real*. ”

Tommy made a very strange expression, as though Wilbur had just said something very stupid. “Wilbur... I think... I think the Blood God is real.”

Wilbur shook his head. “Tommy, think about it. The Blood God has not taken a single one of our sacrifices. That’s all been you and me. And he hasn’t responded to a single one of our prayers—”

“Wilbur—” Tommy tried, but the man kept talking.

“— And if he was real, why hasn’t he smited me for being a false prophet? He should have struck me down by now. He should be mad that I’m not making any blood sacrifices—”

“Wilbur!” Tommy interrupted, looking absolutely overcome with disbelief, “*I’m* the Blood God!”

That shut Wilbur up for a good few seconds.

“You...” The words genuinely were not connecting in Wilbur’s head. “*What?*”

“I’m the Blood God!” Tommy repeated, “I’m real! I’ve been here the whole time!”

“I—” Wilbur closed his eyes, trying to push past this, “Tommy, don’t mess around like that. I’m having a hard enough time without you lying—”

“I’m not lying!” Tommy shouted, downright insulted. He gestured wildly at himself. “I’m the Blood God!”

Wilbur ran his hands over his face. “Tom—”

But it was Tommy’s turn to interrupt. “I swear to Death herself, I’m not fucking with you! I’m being dead serious!” He raised his hands, cracking his knuckles in preparation for something. “Here, look at—”

“Tommy!” Wilbur shouted, snapping the kid’s attention back to him, “We don’t have time for this right now! I’m trying to keep you from getting killed!”

Tommy froze. At once, the atmosphere in the room shifted.

“Killed?” the teen repeated, as though the word was foreign on his tongue.

Suddenly, it dawned on Wilbur. This was how he could convince Tommy to leave. He didn’t need to trick the kid, didn’t need to bare his soul. He just needed to scare the child enough to send him running.

“The High Priest... he’s forcing me to convert to a new god. And you—” Wilbur took a shaky breath, closing his eyes, “You need to *leave*, Tommy. Before you get hurt.”

Tommy didn’t say anything, so Wilbur just kept talking.

“I’m scared, Tommy. Bad just keeps *threatening* me, over and over again, and there’s nothing I can do about any of it. If I don’t do what he says, he’s going to kill all of you, but I— I can’t listen to him. I’m not going to. And it doesn’t matter what happens to me, but I need you and Phil and Techno to *run*. Okay?”

“Bad threatened us? He said that to you?” Tommy’s voice was almost too low to hear.

Wilbur nodded, finally opening his eyes to look at the kid again.

Tommy was furious.

“That *bitch*, ” he hissed, teeth grinding against each other as he stepped away, “I’m going rip his guts out and make him choke on them, that *bastard!*”

As though responding to Tommy's last word, the lone candle lighting the room suddenly flared out, impossibly brilliant. Wilbur physically recoiled at its unnatural brightness, stumbling back with closed eyes.

When he opened them again, the candle was out, entire wick burnt through in a single moment. In the dimness of the room, Wilbur could see the wax drip onto the ground, red like blood.

He could barely get his words out. "You— How did you—"

The prophet had seen Tommy mad before. He had seen the boy hiss under his breath at the guards outside, had seen him curse Quackity out when the man cheated at cards. He had seen Tommy's eyes go stormy, even if it was only for a few seconds.

None of those moments touched the sheer rage on Tommy's face right now.

The fury that radiated from Tommy, that seemed to pour out of him like flames from the sun, seeped and spread into every crevice of the room like poison in blood.

"He thinks he can come into *my* temple, threaten *my* family, steal *my* followers, and just walk away?" Tommy hissed, screwing his eyes shut, "I'll kill him. I'll rip the blood from his body and jam it back into him."

Wilbur wasn't breathing. Could this be Tommy? Was this the same child who teased and comforted Wilbur, who helped paint the walls and mop the floors? Was this even a child at all? Wilbur could hardly recognize the person in front of him, so different from the worried boy who had held him just a minute ago.

And yet, Wilbur could sense that Tommy was holding back, barely restraining the true anger bubbling underneath his skin and teeth. Somehow, that realization made Wilbur even more frightened.

"And his stupid fucking vines! I'm going to burn them to ash and make him choke on them," Tommy shouted, voice too angry to leave any room for debate.

Wilbur protested anyway. "Wait, no, you can't do that! If Bad finds out, he'll—"

"There is *nothing* Bad can threaten me with," Tommy insisted, voice shockingly low and sure.

The kid reached for one of the vines. Without warning or explanation, some red, glowing power began emanating from Tommy's hands, impossible to ignore in the dim room. It was divine and terrible and wonderful all at once—

And then the vines shot out, curling around Tommy's wrist and tugging him towards the wall. The boy yelped in surprise, struggling to pull his hand away.


"Tommy!" Wilbur gasped, grabbing the kid's other arm to yank him free. He didn't get the chance.

At once, several more vines shot forward, twisting together into a point. The prophet could do nothing but watch as they pierced Tommy's heart, splattering blood across the room.

Wilbur screamed.

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur: "I wish the Blood God was real so he could help me."

Tommy: 

Sorry it's been two weeks since the last update lol. The writer's block was *so* intense for this chapter. I hope I pulled it together in the end! If this was a bit intense and you want some fluff instead, check out [my most recent oneshot](#).

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr](#)! Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The next few seconds were the worst of Wilbur's life. He could do nothing but watch and scream as the vines twisted in Tommy's chest, pushing outward to rip the wound even wider. The boy in question just stood there, stunned expression pinned to his face, unable or unwilling to look down and watch himself die.

Wilbur wasn't sure what he would have done if Tommy collapsed to the ground. Maybe he would have fallen to his knees in grief, cradling the boy's lifeless form against his chest. Maybe he would have run to the basement immediately, setting off the TNT in an act of pure rage. Maybe he would have let the vines kill him too, ready to join the person he cared about most in whatever came next.

But Wilbur would never know, because Tommy didn't collapse. He didn't even stumble backwards. Instead, the kid finally looked at his injury for a moment, still more shocked than scared.

And then, in a single, fluid motion, Tommy's fingers clenched the plants and ripped them from his chest. He didn't even flinch, as though he was simply pulling weeds from soil.

The vines in his grip immediately shriveled up, dropping to the floor unceremoniously. Wilbur hardly even noticed them. He was too busy watching Tommy. Tommy, whose eyes were now pure, red light. Tommy, whose hair whipped in a nonexistent wind. Tommy, who wasn't *Tommy* anymore. He was something else. Something more.

Something angry.

At once, all the vines in the room shriveled up and fell to the floor, joining the ones that had pierced Tommy's chest. A single touch would have been enough to turn any of them into dust.

But Wilbur still wasn't looking at the vines. He was too busy watching as the wound in Tommy's chest began to sew itself back up, muscle and veins lacing together like worms in a bucket.

"What the fuck was that?" the god growled, chest still partially open.

The injury closed, but Wilbur kept staring. There were no marks on Tommy's skin. No signs of any scarring. The only evidence that anything had happened at all were the holes in Tommy's shirt and the blood splattered across the room.

"Wilbur?" Tommy asked, taking the prophet's face in his hands. There was something akin to worry in the god's expression. The red light was gone from his eyes. "Wilbur, are you okay? Answer me."

Outside the changing room, someone started screaming.

As the cries rose in number and volume, Tommy dropped Wilbur's face, grabbing the man's hand as he pushed open the door to the temple.

If Wilbur had been a bit less terrified, he might have reached forward to close the door again.

It was carnage. The vines were shooting out from every wall, wrapping and stabbing and strangling the congregation. To Wilbur's right, a woman gasped, plants slowly tightening around her windpipe. To his left, a man screamed, vines ripping through his limbs and torso and pulling him to pieces.

With a wave of Tommy's hand, both followers fell free, vines limp on the ground. The woman coughed and retched as she stumbled forward, clawing at her throat. The man was already dead.

"Techno!" Tommy shouted, "Phil!"

But it was impossible to find anyone amidst the chaos. Men, women, and children fled towards the building's front door, trampling each other in the process. A few of Bad's guards were trying to protect the congregation, but most were as panicked as the public, desperately pushing their own way towards freedom. Every few seconds, another person would get seized by the vines, ready to be choked or torn apart.

"Techno!" Tommy tried again, pushing forward through the crowd. Wilbur felt himself get yanked along, Tommy's vice grip unyielding as the god searched for his family.

"Tommy!" a voice, low and powerful, shouted out from above.

Techno and Phil were in the rafters, Phil's massive wings on full display. A pang shot through Wilbur, equal parts relief and fear. The two were momentarily safe, but with the vines creeping upwards, how long would that last?

"Are you okay?" Techno shouted, barely audible over the screaming.

"I got stabbed but I'm fine now!" Tommy yelled back, shooting his brother a thumbs up. Wilbur felt himself get jostled around by the moving crowds, but with Tommy's hand clenching his, he was able to stand his ground.

Techno did not look at all pleased about that news, but Tommy pressed on before he could speak.

"The congregation—" Tommy shouted, cupping his free hand around his mouth, "Get them out! I'll deal with the vines!"

Techno and Phil both nodded. Before Wilbur could even think to feel horror, Techno dropped down from the rafters, landing with ease on the tiled ground. Then, he shattered open one of the stained-glass windows, grabbing a small girl and chucking her through it.

Without hesitating, Techno reached for another woman. She gasped at the sight of him, pointing her finger as she staggered back a step.

“The Blood God!”

“Nope,” Techno said, grabbing her around the waist and hoisting her up through the window. Before the woman could say another word, she had fallen into the alleyway on the other side, yelping on the way down.

Phil descended from the rafters more gracefully, snatching up a man at random and shooting up through the still-broken skylight. A moment later, he reappeared, grabbing two ladies and repeating his evacuation.

But it was hard to focus on the two of them when Tommy was right in front of Wilbur. Tommy, whose eyes had returned to that horrible, terrible, glowing red. Tommy, whose hair and clothes whipped around like he was stuck in a hurricane, whose face was one of rage and focus, whose eyes darted around the room like a death sentence. Every time he saw a vine shoot out towards a convert, he'd raise his hand and clench it, bursting the plants in explosions of red, oozing pus. The god was clearly done with letting the vines fall limply to the floor. The expression on his face hungered for destruction, for revenge, for something Wilbur couldn't recognize.

Despite everything, Tommy was still holding the prophet's hand.

Wilbur was at a complete loss. Everything was happening so fast, overlapping amidst such unmitigated chaos. He could barely understand what he was seeing. Tommy— It was too much to think about Tommy right now. Whatever the boy was, whatever had happened to him... If Wilbur let those thoughts settle and register in his mind, he'd probably just collapse right onto the floor in shock.

So he didn't. Instead, Wilbur turned around just in time to see one of Bad's main guards charge towards Tommy.

Without thinking or hesitating, Wilbur stepped in front of the guard, blocking Tommy's back with his own body. The man raised his sword above Wilbur's head, not giving the prophet even a moment to panic. He had no weapons, no shields, no ways to defend himself, so Wilbur just raised his free arm, hopeful that the bone might stop the blade from reaching his or Tommy's—

Suddenly, the guard froze, not a single shake in his entire body. Slowly and jerkily, like a puppet on poorly-controlled strings, the guard lowered his blade, holding it out in front of himself. And then, with a single sweep, he sliced open his own neck.

The blood splattered onto Wilbur, covering his face as he desperately tried to spit it out of his mouth. By the time he looked up again, the guard was on the ground, dead.

Standing next to Wilbur was Tommy, hand clenched into a fist. If possible, the rage on the boy's face had multiplied.

I'll kill them, Tommy hissed, voice distant and otherworldly. The words rattled around Wilbur's mind, skipping his ears entirely as they clanged against his skull. *I'll kill anyone who even looks at you.*

Most of the congregation had evacuated the building at this point, with Phil and Techno shepherding out the stragglers. All that was left were the bodies littering the floor, half corpses and half survivors, screaming and howling. With a few waves of his hand, Tommy's power pulled the vines from their already mangled forms. None of the survivors looked like they'd live much longer.

And then there was Bad. The high priest stood upon the altar, face halfway between horror and worship as he peered over the bloody temple.

"Is this your will?" he screamed, something manic and disbelieving painting his features, "Tell me, Egg, and I will follow!"

Tommy's head immediately snapped towards Bad. Wilbur was glad that he could no longer see the boy's face. The anger directed at the High Priest would have been enough to make Wilbur fall to his knees in terror.

Bad barely seemed to register Tommy's presence, eyes darting joyfully between the vines that crept towards him. Wilbur couldn't help but feel dread as the red, monstrous things slithered up the sides of the altar, brushing against Bad's ankles like snakes in a pit.

"Let me be your champion!" Bad gushed, hardly able to get the words out. His breathlessness sent a shiver down Wilbur's spine. "Let me serve you!"

You are insane, Tommy said, voice growing in volume. Or, no, not volume. Pressure, building against the sides of Wilbur's head. Threatening to crack his skull open, spilling his brains onto the floor, joining the gore that already stained the tiles.

Bad finally looked down at Tommy, white eyes wide and rapturous. "I am the Egg's chosen vassal! I will lead the world into a new era!"

You hurt my brother. Wilbur fought the urge to collapse to the ground as Tommy spoke, near-overwhelmed by the growing anger. Only the kid's hand grounded him. *You threatened my family and killed my followers.*

"Yours?" Bad asked, as though he was only just now noticing the sheer power emanating from Tommy. He reached his arm out, as though he could grab the god and examine him more thoroughly.

Tommy clenched his free hand, body shaking with anger as he pulled Wilbur a little closer. The vines nearest to their feet withered and retracted, the pure rage radiating from the god enough to shrivel them into husks.

And yet, Wilbur felt more secure than he had all day. Something fierce and protective seemed to be pulsing through Tommy's hand into his, filling his veins with an unfamiliar strength as the god took a lone step forward.

You will never touch the people I love ever again.

At that moment, Wilbur spotted Phil and Techno, crouched low before the altar. With a single flap of his wings, Phil surged forward, slashing his enchanted sword straight through Bad's outstretched arm. As the limb tumbled to the ground, Techno's axe embedded itself in the high priest's chest, knocking the man to his knees.

But Bad did not scream. He did not even whimper as he rose back to his feet, vines forcing Phil and Techno to make a quick retreat. The plants lifted Bad's arm from the ground, tying it back to his body like stitches. As the High Priest tested his fingers, yet more vines began to crawl up his chest, digging into his axe wound and filling it with red.

Tommy's healing had been terrifying, but this? This was unnatural.

Wilbur watched in horror as Bad raised his newly reattached arm. The same vines that stitched him back together now shot from his palm, straight towards Phil and Techno

"Aw, what the fuck?" Phil squawked, throwing himself backwards to avoid Bad's attack. Techno, meanwhile, dodged to the side, only narrowly avoiding the plants writhing on the ground.

Bad laughed, raising both his arms towards the ceiling. At once, the bodies on the floor, few of which were still living, began to twitch.

Like puppets, all of the corpses rose to their feet, bodies limp and torn as the vines crammed their way into every open mouth. Wilbur watched helplessly as the guard by his feet staggered upright, throat still torn open as his lifeless, empty eyes rolled back. The vines that could not fit down the corpse's throat began encircling him, like living armor.

It was worse than what Tommy had done. That control had been horrible and deadly, but it had been momentary. This was parasitic, infesting the bodies it took root in with no intention of letting go.

Tommy pulled Wilbur back from the guard's corpse.

"Run," he ordered.

Wilbur didn't hesitate, sprinting towards the front doors. Then, once in the doorway, he turned to get one last look at the scene behind him.

Phil and Techno were fighting the bodies. Watching Techno attack, Wilbur remembered why he had originally been intimidated by the man. Tommy's brother was a mass of power and strength, near-unstoppable in his rampage. But it wasn't just pure chaos. Every one of Techno's moves was clearly calculated, optimized to give him the ultimate edge in battle.

"Four men down!" Techno shouted, pulling his axe out of an enemy's chest. The vines immediately started reforming, wiggling on the ground as Techno chopped off the host's head.

“I’m at six!” Phil grinned, bouncing off the pews and slashing his sword straight through a half-formed mass of vines. Some of the corpses, especially those which had been torn apart already, look more plant than human, but Wilbur was too busy watching Phil's deadly dance to care much about that. In all the ways that Techno was strong and powerful, Phil was quick and dangerous, and yet neither of them seemed to outstrip the other. Both men had an efficiency, an intelligence that was clear in their eyes, and it was petrifying, like they had already decided how to kill their next opponent before either side made the first move.

Wilbur pushed back a shudder. With Phil’s wings fully extended and his teeth bared in a smile, he truly looked like an angel, terrifying and half-mad.

Techno groaned, turning to fight another body. “Leave some for me! Why don’t you try slowing down, old man!”

“Why don’t *you* try catching up?” Phil laughed. With a flap of his wings, he was at Techno’s side, back-to-back as more reanimated corpses lumbered towards them.

For anyone else, it would have been horrifying. The vines would have been proof of the apocalypse. They would have been the first wave of an impossible, endless battle. But Phil and Techno were both smiling. Wilbur couldn’t understand it.

“There’s an awful lot of them,” Techno grumbled, but the corners of his mouth were still curled up.

“One second,” Phil said, handing Techno his sword and clasping his hands in prayer. For a moment he closed his eyes, then looked up to the ceiling.

“Hello, darling,” he said, a smooth smile running across his lips, “We could really use some help right now.”

At once, a change slinked its way over Phil and Techno. If they had radiated power before, it was nothing compared to the sheer aura that now seeped from their every movement. It was horrifying, like looking one's own death in the face.

Both men grinned. Something inhuman seemed to pulse through them, different but parallel to the power that still radiated from Tommy.

Tommy. How had Wilbur, even momentarily, forgotten about Tommy? How had he let his fear push him to the front door, instead of by the boy’s side?

One look at the god pushed all that guilt straight from Wilbur’s mind.

None of the vines could even touch Tommy. Any that got close immediately burst from some unseen pressure, shrinking back before trying again. The sheer power his young body held would have been enough to send legions to their knees. It would have been enough to send the temple crumbling to the ground.

It was just barely enough to hold the vines back.

But Tommy wasn't paying the plants any mind. Instead, he walked directly towards Bad, each step a new death sentence.

"So you're the Blood God, then?" Bad asked, cocking his head to the side, "I'll be honest, I didn't see that one coming."

Shut the fuck up, Tommy growled, lunging at the High Priest with bare hands.

Bad raised his fist, a wave of vines shielding him from Tommy. The god cut through them with a single hit, pinning Bad against the wall.

The victory was short-lived. At once, the vines attached to Bad's body shot through Tommy's face and throat, weakening the god's grip. With another few vines yanking Bad away, Tommy stumbled back, ripping himself free from the plants. His body healed within seconds.

Then, he lunged at Bad again.

"You can't beat us!" Bad laughed, vines swatting Tommy to the side, "The Egg has been stealing energy from your sacrifices for months! However powerful you are, we have twice your strength!"

I told you to shut up! Tommy howled, successfully throwing Bad into a wall. The vines cushioned the blow.

Techno and Phil were still fighting the corpses, weaving past each other like well-oiled machines. Wilbur was stunned at how efficiently they moved, but despite all their skill and stamina, it was clear they would eventually slip.

It was the little things. The way Phil's foot stumbled slightly. The way Techno's hair was falling out of his braid. Neither of them were wearing any kind of armor. Neither of them had been prepared for a fight.

And then, with a swing of Phil's sword and a thud of a body, one of the torches on the wall fell loose.

The effect was immediate. The vines lit up like gasoline, twisting and writhing in an attempt to put themselves out. They had almost succeeded, when—

"The fire!" Phil shouted, "It's weak to fire!"

Wilbur's heart plummeted as Phil tore another torch down from the wall, slashing the vines with the flame. It fell even deeper as Techno copied the winged man's movements, both of them spreading the fire across the tiny temple at unbelievable speed.

"No!" Bad screeched, gasping as though he himself was in pain, "Stop!"

This couldn't be happening. Wilbur watched as the flames spread to the pews and the walls and the rafters, towards the altar and the basement. The basement. Where Wilbur had set up TNT just this morning, rigged to blow at the first spark—

Without thinking, Wilbur sprinted towards the basement door. One vine on the ground nearly sent him sprawling, but he righted himself as he stumbled forward, throwing the door open and pounding down the basement stairs.

Then, something snagged the collar of his shirt, yanking him back a few steps from the bottom.

“Wilbur!” Tommy gasped, pulling the prophet closer, “You have to get out of here! The fire —!”

No. No, no, no, Tommy could not be down here, not when the flames were still spreading and the TNT was about to go off, taking the entire building with it—

It was at that moment that Wilbur noticed a cut on Tommy’s cheek, small and fine, but bleeding nonetheless. Without thinking, he reached up to wipe away the drops of blood pooling against Tommy’s skin.

The kid leaned into the touch, grabbing Wilbur’s hand firmly. The prophet’s expression must have been horrified, because Tommy tried to reassure him with a smile.

“I’m fine, Wilbur,” Tommy said, “It’s so small that I didn’t even notice it. I just forgot to heal it. I’m fine.”

And sure enough, as Wilbur ran his finger along the cut, it closed up seamlessly, as though it had never been there at all.

“See, Wilbur?” Tommy said, still smiling, “It’s all good.”

Tommy was getting hurt. He may have been a god, but he was still a boy. He didn’t deserve to get injured, to get stabbed and hit and ripped apart because of Wilbur’s mistakes. Tommy was strong, but despite all his power, Wilbur was scared. Scared of Bad. Scared of the vines. Scared of losing his little brother.

Tommy was the Blood God. The thought didn’t even fit into Wilbur’s mind. It was too foreign. Too impossible. How could such a young and cheerful boy being the embodiment of such gore, the patron of such slaughter?

But no. That didn’t make sense, did it? The Blood God, to Wilbur’s knowledge, had ignored mankind’s blood offerings, at least for the last few centuries. If Tommy was the god of blood, he was not the god of bloodshed.

When he thought of his little brother, Wilbur did not think of war or pain. He did not think of wounds or death. All he could think of was family.

No part of him felt angry or resentful about the boy's secrets. After all, hadn’t Wilbur lied in equal measure? All that mattered now was getting rid of the vines. Wilbur had to protect Tommy and Phil and Techno, no matter the cost.

He knew exactly what to do.

“Listen, Tommy,” he said, voice as steady as he could manage, “I need you to go find Phil and Techno and get them out of this temple, right now. The building isn’t going to last much longer with this fire.”

Tommy frowned. “What about you?”

“I—” What was he supposed to tell Tommy? Not to worry about him? “... I’m going to get Quackity.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “Big Q’s still downstairs?”

“Yeah, Tommy,” Wilbur lied, “I’ll meet you outside in a few minutes. End of the street, okay? Me and Big Q will use the basement window. You know? The one I helped you climb through the night I met you?”

Tommy nodded. “But what about the Egg and the vines?”

Wilbur hugged Tommy close. “The fire’s holding the vines back for now, right? I’ve got a plan to stop them. But we need to get everyone out of the temple first. Make sure Bad doesn’t follow you.”

Tommy hugged Wilbur back. “Okay,” he said, “Okay. I can do that.”

Wilbur wasn’t quite sure if Tommy was a kid, but in his arms, the boy still felt so small. So precious. Wilbur would have done anything to keep him safe.

“I love you, Tommy,” he whispered, kissing his little brother’s forehead, “Thank you.”

Tommy smiled up at Wilbur. “I love you too.” The kid pulled away. “See you in five!”

And with that, Tommy was gone, rushing up the stairs. Wilbur watched him leave.

The moment the door slammed shut behind Tommy, Wilbur started sprinting to the TNT. He had left a candle lit in his room that morning, and was relieved to find it still burning. With careful hands, he rushed over to the corner of his bedroom, lighting the first batch of explosives.

He couldn’t afford to wait for the upstairs fire to find the fuses on its own. There were too many variables to leave something like that up to chance. What if Bad and the vines successfully put the fire out? What, if in the time it took for the flames to reach the basement, the vines spread outside the temple? Wilbur couldn’t let his family get hurt any worse than they already had been., and that meant making sure the TNT went off as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Wilbur almost dropped the candle as he pulled away, nerves making his hands shake. He needed to be fast. According to Techno, each fuse would give him a few minutes of wiggle room to escape. If he moved quickly enough, he could keep his promise to Tommy, climbing out the back window with time to spare.

First his own room. Then Quackity's. Then Tommy's. On his way out of his bedroom, Wilbur grabbed his guitar, slinging it over his back. Feeling the gift so close gave him a bit more confidence, something he needed when he eventually approached Eret's room.

The door, as always, was locked, but Wilbur needed to set up the last quarter of TNT in there. The glorified closet was home to one of the building's four load-bearing beams. If the temple was going to come down completely, he needed to break in.

Throwing all his weight forward, Wilbur slammed his shoulder against the door once. Then a second time. Then a third.

Nothing. It was as solid as ever.

"What are you doing?" a voice hissed.

Wilbur's head snapped up. Standing at the top of the stairs, face engulfed with rage as the fire blazed behind him, was Bad.

"You..." Bad said, "You're trying to ruin everything! All my hard work! I won't let you. I won't let you!"

The High Priest raised his hand, dozens of vines immediately shooting towards Wilbur.

The prophet dodged, a few of the vines nipping his arm as he just barely ducked out of the way. The plants lodged themselves firmly in the door, ripping themselves back, and—

The door was splintering. Without giving it another thought, Wilbur threw himself at it again, shoulder bracing for the impact.

The door did not come off its hinges, but by some miracle, Wilbur broke through, staggering his way into Eret's room.

At once he stopped breathing. There was something on the bed. Something big and red and pulsing, connected to countless vines that had ripped their way through the ceilings and the walls. The entity in front of him was the personification of fear. It was horror. It was dread.

With a start, Wilbur recognized the anxious feeling in his heart. It was the same strange, artificial emotion that had poisoned his every waking moment for weeks, dialed up to 11.

Somehow, the realization made Wilbur less scared.

This was the Egg. It was so small, compared to what Wilbur had been expecting, maybe three feet tall at most, wrapped in blankets on Eret's bed to keep it upright.

Why the fuck would Bad worship something like this?

Without another second of hesitation, Wilbur lifted the last of the TNT up to his mouth. His teeth ripped into the fuse, shortening it by several inches. Now, a single spark would light it up immediately.

With that in mind, Wilbur shoved the TNT into the side of the Egg's fleshy skin, just barely above the blankets. It sunk in like a tooth into rotting flesh, fuse still exposed.

At that moment, Bad appeared in the doorway.

Vines shot through Wilbur's back, piercing his shoulder, stomach, and limbs. Only pure luck kept his lungs and heart intact, his now-splinted guitar blocking a few of the vines.

"You hurt it!" Bad gasped, stumbling towards the Egg as Wilbur collapsed to the floor. His candle slipped from his hand, skidding towards Eret's bed. "What is this, TNT? The fire upstairs won't reach this basement, you traitor. The vines will make sure of that."

If Wilbur had been in a bit less pain, he might have laughed. As it was, he just smiled, blood dripping from his teeth.

The fallen candle had lit Eret's sheets aflame. Soon, the little fire would reach the egg.

"What?" Bad asked, standing above Wilbur, "You're dying. What's so funny? Your friends abandoned you. The TNT isn't even lit. You've lost, Wilbur. You betrayed the Egg, and now you're going to die."

So everyone else had made it out okay. The thought made Wilbur happy. Against all odds, everything was going to be fine.

"Why are you smiling?" Bad screeched, pulling Wilbur up by the collar of his shirt, "Answer me!"

The minutes had run out. Wilbur's chance to escape was gone.

He didn't regret anything. Some part of him had known that this was going to happen. Why else would he have hugged Tommy goodbye?

"Sorry, Bad," Wilbur wheezed, ignoring the pain brought on by every word, "It was never meant to be."

Bad said something else, but Wilbur wasn't listening anymore. Couldn't, really. Everything was getting too foggy. Too distant. At least the searing agony in his chest hurt a bit less.

Please, he prayed, more out of habit than anything else, *Be safe*.

That was the last thing Wilbur thought before the TNT went off.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy: "Oh boy, I can't wait to see Wilbur and Quackity in a few min-"
explosions

To the people on Twitter who were trying to count all of the characters' kill counts, you can add two to Wilbur's!

We've got two more chapters to wrap this thing up! Who's excited?

I had such severe writer's block for this chapter. I knew what I *wanted* to happen, but not how to write it. I think it turned out pretty cool though!

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr](#)! Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur awoke slowly. The stone bench he was laying on was cold to the touch, a few degrees cooler than the air. Upon blinking, he noticed the cavernous ceilings above him, near cathedral-like as the rock walls sloped upwards. There were a few lowered tracks that shot off into various tunnels, but there were no carts on any of them, and no noise but his own stilted breathing. Maybe this was some kind of catacomb? Or an old mine? It was certainly dirty enough to be the latter, with a thin layer of dirt and grime on every surface.

The room was entirely unrecognizable. Wilbur had never been anywhere like it before. Or had he? Everything felt a little foggy right now, like his memories were stretching just out of reach.

Someone had bunched up a black cardigan and set it under his head, making a makeshift pillow. Unless... was this *his* cardigan? No. It couldn't be. The sleeves were too short and the cut was too feminine. Then who had put it there? He was pretty sure that the guitar tucked under the bench was his, at the very least. The drawings on it looked familiar.

Despite the fogginess, Wilbur's chest felt clear for the first time in... well, he couldn't remember what he had been like before this, but it was definitely the first time in a very long while. It was as though some deep paranoia had finally been uprooted from his stomach. The anxious knot that had set up shop right next to his heart was gone.

It was a bit unnerving.

"You're awake!" a voice said, floating through the air like a leaf on a brook. At once, Wilbur's eyes shot sideways, turning towards the person who had spoken.

His breath caught.

The woman in front of him wasn't human. Power seemed to ebb off of her, gentle and overwhelming, washing down her long, dark hair and pooling on her tan skin. She wore a flowing, black dress and a wide-brimmed hat, veil tracing the edges.

Then, before Wilbur could decide whether to be scared or reverent, she pulled the veil back, revealing a sweet face. "Hello, Wilbur," the woman said, looking at him with a sad smile, "I wasn't expecting you to be here so soon."

Endless questions raced through Wilbur's mind, fighting to get to the forefront. He didn't know what this place was, and he could barely remember anything that had come before this very moment. He had been... with Techno, maybe? Or Phil? Tommy, definitely. But now he was here, in this cavern, with a woman who seemed to recognize him. Wilbur had so much to ask: Where he had ended up, how he had gotten here, who the woman was, but the first one that reached his lips was:

“You know me?”

The woman’s smile broadened. “I know all of the Universe’s children. That’s one of the perks of the job. But I’ll admit,” she said, eyeing him a bit coyly, “I’ve heard a lot more about you than I normally do.”

Wilbur wasn’t quite sure what that meant, but he was never one for stumbling. “All good, I hope?”

The woman laughed, sitting next to him on the bench. “Mostly. I’ve been told you’re very witty, and a good leader. That you’ve got a lovely singing voice. And, of course, that you’re very protective of Tommy. A good older brother. You love your family very much, don’t you?”

Wilbur’s heart dropped. All at once, as though the words had turned some key in his mind, he could remember where he had just been.

The temple. The TNT. How had Wilbur escaped? How had he gotten to this bench?

“My— My—” Wilbur wasn’t sure how to describe the situation he had left behind, but he had to try. “Tommy—”

“Oh, don’t worry,” the woman said, looking quite sympathetic about Wilbur’s distress, “Your family should be here soon. Gods, I’m not going to be able to keep them out, once they realize you’re here with me.”

“I— Where are we?”

“The Afterlife, of course,” the woman said, as though she wasn’t shattering Wilbur’s entire sense of reality, “Or, Limbo, more specifically. I dogeared your case, since there’s probably going to be an appeal. But don’t worry about all that.”

“Don’t—” Wilbur was dead, and some stranger was telling him not to worry about it. Without realizing it, his breath had quickened, skyrocketing so drastically that he fell to his knees, hands clutching his chest.

“Oh!” the woman shouted, kneeling down beside him. She was getting dirt on her wonderful dress, but she didn’t seem to care about that. “Are you okay? Here, um, let me get you some tea. Mortals still drink tea, right? That hasn’t changed?”

With a wave of her hand, a tray of tea and biscuits appeared on the ground in front of them, steam rising from a perfect teapot and a single, perfect teacup. That wasn’t the strange part, though. Somehow, the china was the exact same set Wilbur’s mother had used every day for teatime throughout his entire childhood. It was the same teapot that Wilbur had chipped when he was eight after dropping it on the kitchen floor, but there was no chip in its base now. It was as though the entire set had been pulled directly from his earliest memories.

Wilbur started breathing even more erratically.

“Oh, oh man, no tea then!” the woman said, waving her hand again. The tray evaporated, not a speck of grime out of place to imply that it had ever existed.

Wilbur was panicking. Could the woman do that to him? Wave her hand and make him disappear?

“There’s no need to be scared,” the woman said, raising her hands in surrender. But Wilbur wasn’t an idiot. He knew better than to let his guard down so quickly.

“Who—” he gasped, flinching as she hesitantly reached out for him, “Who are you?”

The woman looked very upset, pulling back. “I’m Lady Death,” she said, hands restless.

Wilbur heard the words, but did not understand them. Why would the goddess of death reveal herself to him? Why would she look at him with such concern? Why would she offer him *tea*?

“I don’t— I can’t—” Wilbur whispered, voice high and pitiful. He didn’t want to be here anymore. He wanted Phil to wrap his wings around him. He wanted Tommy to distract him with idle chatter. He wanted Techno to place a firm hand on his shoulder. Anything. Anything to ground him for even a moment.

“I know it’s all very confusing right now,” Lady Death said, genuine sympathy in her voice, “And I’ll answer any questions you have. I watched your death, Wilbur. It wasn’t very pretty. You might have a bit of trouble reorienting yourself after something like that.”

His death. Wilbur remembered his death. It... it had hurt. It had hurt a lot.

Things didn’t hurt now. That realization made Wilbur falter once more.

At that moment, a light appeared at the end of one of the room’s many tunnels. Distantly, some horn echoed.

“Oh!” Lady Death said, straightening slightly. She quickly got to her feet, dusting her dress off, though no grime had dared to stick to it. “That’s them! They’ll be able to help!”

Wilbur wasn’t sure what the goddess was talking about, but with a quick wave of her hand, a strange, metal contraption shot out from one of the tunnels, coming to an immediate stop in the dead center of the room. Its strange doors slid open with a terrible click and a hiss, and immediately, three figures spilled out from it, as though they had been pressing up against the other side.

Techno and Phil stumbled a few steps before catching themselves, but Tommy fell directly onto his face, skidding slightly forward.

“Tommy!” Lady Death gasped, rushing towards the boy, “You’re supposed to wait until the doors open—”

“Where the fuck is he?” Tommy growled, pushing himself off the ground. His expression was hard for Wilbur to place. The boy didn’t seem angry, necessarily. Wilbur had seen him angry

and otherworldly, and this was not it. He looked more... possessive. Like something had been stolen from him.

Techno and Phil were similarly bold, completely unintimidated by the goddess in front of them. If anything, they seemed more concerned about Tommy's recent faceplant.

Something terrible rushed down Wilbur's spine. If... if they were here in the Afterlife... that meant—

"You're—" Wilbur said. He wasn't hyperventilating anymore. In fact, he felt as though he couldn't breathe at all. "What are you doing here?"

All eyes snapped to Wilbur, noticing him suddenly.

"Wil!" Tommy shouted, dashing across the stone floor. In an instant, Wilbur was being hugged, arms tight and grounding around him.

Tommy didn't *seem* dead, with his warm skin and heavy breaths, but then again, neither did Wilbur. Desperately, Wilbur cupped the boy's face in his hands, trying to make sense of everything.

"Tommy, Toms," Wilbur said, running a hand through the teen's hair, "Are you— Did I—"

"He's fine, mate," Phil said, suddenly appearing next to them. The man gave Wilbur a comforting smile, rubbing circles into the prophet's back. Lady Death was holding Phil's other hand. "We're all fine."

"Well," Techno said, standing on the group's other side, "I wouldn't say that. Wilbur's dead."

"Wilbur," Phil corrected, "is *temporarily* experiencing the Afterlife. Don't be so fucking morbid, Techno."

"Morbid?" Techno balked, "I'm stating the truth! He blew himself up!"

Wilbur felt his shoulders loosen slightly. It was comforting to be surrounded by all of them, despite everything, though he still felt terrified.

"So you're not—" Wilbur asked, looking desperately between the people in front of him. He couldn't even bring himself to ask.

Tommy's eyes widened. "What? No, no, we're not dead!"

"Yeah," Techno confirmed, "That is distinctly a *you* problem right now."

Relief flooded through Wilbur. He almost collapsed in Tommy's arms, working quickly to steady himself. "Then... then how are you here?"

"Kristin let us in," Techno said simply, explaining absolutely nothing at all.

"Kr—" Wilbur started, shaking his head, "You mean Phil's *girlfriend*?"

“Guilty as charged,” Lady Death smiled, leaning a bit closer to Phil.

Wilbur’s mouth fell open. He did *not* have the mental energy to unpack that right now, but luckily, he didn’t have to. Tommy was already yelling again.

“I’m taking Wilbur back!” the teen shouted, fingers digging possessively into Wilbur’s shirt.

Kristin frowned. “Tommy, you know it’s not that easy. Wilbur died. That means he’s part of my domain.”

Tommy scowled. “But *I* claimed him! He’s *my* head priest and prophet!”

“I know. That does...” Kristin hesitated, looking for the right words, “... make things a little more complicated.”

“It’s not fucking complicated! You’re stealing Wilbur from me! Give him back!”

“Tommy,” Kristin said, still kind but a bit more stern, as though she was scolding a misbehaving child, “I’m not trying to keep him from you. I know how much you all care about him. Phil’s told me plenty. But reviving him isn’t easy. I can make him a new body, but there needs to be an trade if you want to take his soul—”

“‘*A soul for a soul*, ’” Tommy groaned, “I know, I know. All that fucking ‘equivalent exchange’ bullshit. I’m not a little kid. I know how reviving someone from the dead works.”

“Wait, what?” Techno interrupted, looking genuinely confused, “I thought you guys could just bring people back. Isn’t that what Tommy did when I got sacrificed?”

Wilbur had absolutely lost track of the conversation. What the fuck was everyone talking about? When had Techno gotten sacrificed? How did they all know Lady Death?

The goddess shook her head. “Tommy pulled you back from the *brink* of death and healed you, but you never technically died. Bringing back a soul that’s already fully passed... that’s a bit trickier. Another life needs to be exchanged. There needs to be an equal number of souls under Death’s domain, before and after.”

Tommy huffed. “Fine. We’ll go back to the mortal realm, find someone who’s ready to die, and then bring them back here. We don’t—”

At that moment, Wilbur doubled over, coughing horribly into the crook of his elbow. Each cough brought him further to his knees, until he was barely crawling, hands on the ground.

Someone above him gasped.

Wilbur’s body was beginning to blow away like sand. Each cough seemed to shake more from his bones, crumbling him into nothing. It was as painless as it was horrifying.

Kristin kneeled down and took Wilbur’s face in her hands. For a few moments, everything felt steady again, until the urge to cough rose in his throat once more.

“We’re running out of time,” Kristin mumbled, rubbing tiny circles into Wilbur’s cheeks, “I can’t keep him stable for very long. His soul is trying to move on. It is *not* happy that I’m holding it here.”

“I... I’m dying?” Wilbur asked, voice raspy and hollow.

“Oh, Wilbur,” Kristin replied, a deep sadness in her eyes, “You’re already dead, remember?”

“Why is he moving on so quickly?” Phil asked, worry etched into every feature, “I thought that people usually lasted longer than this. It’s only been a few minutes!”

“Souls only linger when they have unfinished business,” Kristin explained, “Wilbur died content, believing that his purpose had been fulfilled. His soul has no reason *not* to pass on.”

“What!” Tommy shouted, clearly startled by the news, “That’s stupid! Wilbur, unfinish some of your business right now! Think of something you still want to do!”

There was a lot that Wilbur wanted to do. He wanted to finish teaching Tommy guitar. He wanted to fly with Phil across entire cities. He wanted to cook a meal for Techno, just like the man always did for him.

But all of that felt so distant. So... separate from what he was experiencing right now. It was hard to focus on things like that when he could feel himself slowly, comfortably slipping away.

A piece of his shoulder crumbled off, disappearing into nonexistent winds.

“It’s not working!” Tommy shouted, looking at Techno and Phil with complete despair.

“We’re wasting time,” Techno said, “We have to go back to the mortal realm and find a soul we can exchange for Wilbur’s. Kristin, is there a specific kind of soul we need to look for?”

“There’s not enough time,” Kristin murmured, looking at Wilbur a bit distantly, “He won’t last another 10 minutes, even with my help. By the time you get back, he’ll have passed on completely.”

Techno’s face fell, something akin to horror appearing in his eyes. Slowly, he looked back at Wilbur, a growing realization in his expression.

Tommy just scowled. “Well that’s fucking dumb! You’re Lady Death! Do something!”

Kristin shook her head. “There’s nothing I can do without a human soul to exchange for his. The amount of souls under my control must stay equal, otherwise we risk destabilizing the entire order of Life and Death.” She pursed her lips. “I know you love him, Tommy, but I can’t put all of humanity at risk for one person.”

Wilbur hated the look on Tommy’s face. He hated that raw, vulnerable despair. He would have reached out, would have hugged Tommy, would have comforted him, but everything felt... distant. Like if he moved at all, he might slip away entirely.

“It’s his time, Tommy,” Kristin said, looking sadly towards the boy, “Death comes for all humans eventually. Their souls can’t stand eternity.”

Tommy turned away. “I don’t fucking care. Techno’s right. We can’t just stand here and do nothing!” He took a deep breath. “I’m going to go find a soul. Tell me what kind I need.”

“Any living, human soul would technically work,” the goddess said, “as long as the person doesn’t already belong to another god, but like I said, you won’t make it in time, Tommy. It’d be better if you didn’t waste your goodbyes—”

But the god was already gone, hopping down onto the tracks and sprinting off into the tunnel he came from. In a moment, he was gone.

Kristin sighed. “He won’t get very far like that,” she muttered, glancing over to Techno and Phil.

Techno had taken a few steps to the side, peering down the tunnel after Tommy with visible concern. Phil, in contrast, was deep in thought, hand over his mouth.

“You said,” Phil mumbled, mostly to himself, “That the amount of souls under your control needs to stay equal.”

Kristin nodded. “Anything else might destabilize the Afterlife. As much as you all care about Wilbur, I can’t risk that.” The goddess seemed genuinely upset, closing her eyes. “I’m so sorry, love.”

“But does the soul need to die?” Phil asked.

Kristin paused, looking up at her boyfriend. “I don’t understand.”

“I mean,” Phil said, “you said the same amount of souls need to be *under your control*, right? What if you made someone a champion, like Techno with Tommy? Then their soul would still belong to you, correct? It would still be an exchange?”

Kristin didn’t say anything. She just looked off into the distance, considering what Phil was saying.

Techno nodded, stepping back towards everyone. “That makes sense,” he said, “I mean, I technically belong to Tommy. That’s why my soul wouldn’t work in the exchange. Because it already belongs to someone else.”

“But she could take my soul,” Phil said, almost too quiet to hear.

Both Kristin and Techno froze, gazes immediately shooting towards the winged man.

“You need a living, human soul that isn’t already attached to any of the gods,” Phil said, more firm this time, “That’s me. I’m the only one here who can do it.”

“No,” Kristin whispered, her hands slipping slightly from Wilbur’s face.

Phil reached down, cupping one of Kristin's hands and raising it again. Wilbur could feel the pressure of both against his cheek, holding him a bit more steady. "But you wouldn't even have to kill me. Not if you make me your champion."

"Absolutely not," Kristin said, eyes locked on Phil in horror, "You... I won't do that. I won't take your freedom from you."

"Kristin," Phil said, "I trust you."

"No. No, you can't convince me to do this, Phil," Kristin insisted, looking at her boyfriend with something close to despair, "It's not worth it."

"If we don't do this, Wilbur will die," Phil said quietly. There was a fierce, loving determination in his eyes.

Kristin looked at Wilbur for a moment, almost as though she had forgotten she was holding him.

"Please, love," Phil said, voice earnest and strong, "You've loved me for a hundred years—"

"A hundred years is nothing," Kristin whispered, "It's barely a single lifetime. I don't want you to regret this. I don't—I never want to become what *they* were to you."

"It wouldn't be like that. It'd be different."

"How?" Kristin asked, sounding absolutely devastated, "How would it be any better for you than it was back then?"

"Because I'm *choosing* you, Kristin," Phil said, "That's the difference. I'm choosing you."

The expression on Kristin's face was impossible to decipher. There was unbelievable pain in it, an ancient worry that seemed to rest heavy in her eyes, but at the same time, Wilbur couldn't help but see a bit of hope.

"If you had asked me," Phil confessed, "I would have become your champion years ago. Not because I love you, though I do. I love you so much, baby. But because I trust you."

The words hung in the air for a moment. Then—

"Will you marry me?" Kristin asked.

Phil looked as though he was hardly breathing. "Kristin—"

"I love you," she interrupted, looking remarkably nervous for the immortal personification of Death, "and I want to spend eternity with you. If you're going to give yourself to me, I want you to never doubt how much I adore you. I want you to wake up every morning knowing that I cherish and respect you above all else. I want you to understand that I would do *anything* for you. I want to be yours in all the ways you would be mine. You wouldn't belong to me, Phil. We'd belong to each other."

Phil didn't say anything, his eyes still wide.

Kristin pushed on. "You can say no. You can always say no, baby. Every choice is yours to make. You could be my champion. You could walk away," she said, "But I need you to understand: Whatever you decide, whatever we do, we do it as equals. Always equals, above all else. I swear it."

"Equals," Phil whispered, not in disbelief or confusion, but some deep kind of understanding.

Kristin nodded. "Whatever you give me, I'll give it back willingly. Before you are my champion or my follower, you will be my husband or my partner or my friend. Whatever you choose. It'll always be your choice, baby."

"Yes," Phil said, voice breathless.

Kristin's eyes lit up. "Yes?"

"Yes!" Phil said, louder and happier this time, "Of course! Of course I'll marry you!"

At that, Kristin dropped Wilbur's face entirely, throwing herself into her fiancé's arms. Phil spread out his wings and laughed, spinning the goddess in complete, unfiltered joy.

"I'm just upset that I didn't get to ask you myself," Phil said, putting Kristin down. She giggled. "I had this whole plan involving— Oh, never mind. I'll do it for our anniversary or something."

At that moment, Tommy ran out of one of the tunnels. Curiously, it was the opposite one he had exited through.

Stop looping back around! Tommy screamed, voice vibrating throughout the entire cavern. A bit more of Wilbur's right hand blew away, but the god didn't notice, too busy glaring at the tunnel behind him with a fury that would have made weathered soldiers tremble. *Let me out!*

"Tommy" Phil shouted, catching the god's attention, "I need you to officiate me and Kristin's wedding!"

Tommy looked at Phil in complete disbelief, a bit of his aura fading. "I mean, congratulations, big man, but I'm trying to save Wilbur! Now's not really the time to talk about this—"

"No, I need you to marry us right now!"

Tommy paused, the disbelief on his face doubling. "*What!?*"

Phil turned to Techno, whose eyes were oddly wet.

"Will you be my best man?" Phil asked, reaching out to squeeze Techno's hand.

Techno smiled, squeezing it right back. "Anything for you, Phil."

And then Phil's attention was on Wilbur.

"Hold on for just another minute, mate, okay?" Phil said softly, stroking Wilbur's hair with an absurd level of fondness, "You're going to be okay."

Wilbur wasn't sure if his voice still worked, but he nodded, trying to ignore the bits of his nose that blew away with the gesture.

Tommy was now at Wilbur's side, looking between Phil and Kristin. With the boy's hand on his shoulder, Wilbur felt a bit more stable.

"What the fuck is going on right now?" Tommy asked.

"Phil's marrying Kristin," Techno explained, "He's giving her his soul."

Tommy's eyes widened at that, his gaze immediately shooting to Phil. "But—"

"Tommy." Phil smiled reassuringly. "I've thought this through. Don't worry. We love each other. I want this."

The teen bit his lip, looking at Phil for a second. "Are you sure?" he whispered.

Phil nodded. "I know you're scared about me getting hurt," he said, wrapping his arms around the kid, "but I'm going to be okay. I promise. This is what I want. I've never been more sure of anything in my entire life"

Tommy took a deep breath before hugging Phil back. He dug his face into the man's shoulder. "I love you, Phil."

"I never doubted that, Tommy," Phil whispered, wrapping his wings around the Blood God, "I love you too. I love you so much, mate."

"Uhhh, guys?" Techno said, "I hate to interrupt this beautiful moment, but Wilbur doesn't look so good."

Wilbur was at over half gone at this point, the right side of his body entirely blown away, as well as a good chunk of his left. Wilbur would have been concerned about it but it was all so... hard right now. It was easier to just slip into nothingness.

"No, no!" Tommy shouted, running back to Wilbur and wrapping his arms around him. A bit more of Wilbur's mind came back to him. "We have to do the wedding right now!"

Phil nodded, turning to Kristin. "Sorry it can't be more romantic," he said apologetically.

Kristin just grinned. "Are you kidding? Anything with you is perfect."

Phil kissed Kristin at that, only interrupted by Tommy's shouting.

"No, no, no! You kiss *after* the ceremony! Fuck, how am I even supposed to do this?"

“Ask them if they take each other in sickness and in health,” Techno suggested helpfully.

“Right, right, Kristin, do you—”

“I do,” she said, not hesitating for even a moment. She reached out to squeeze Phil’s hand, keeping their fingers clasped together.

Tommy nodded. “Right. Just so you know, if you ever hurt Phil, I will personally make the rest of your eternity a living hell. And Phil—”

“Yes. I mean, I do. I really do.”

“Right then. By the power invested in me as the God of Blood, I now pronounce you man and wife! You may kiss the bride.”

At once, Kristin was in Phil’s arms, kissing him passionately. Sheer power radiated from the pair, forcing Techno to take a literal step backwards, but neither spouse seemed to care. After all, they were in the eye of the storm. Nothing could touch them. As Phil’s wings flared out, shining like onyx, he seemed unaware of his surroundings, too in awe of the woman in front of him. As Kristin opened her eyes, pulling away slowly from the kiss, Wilbur noticed the equal wonder that seemed to shine from her face, too.

It was there, in the grimy tunnels of Limbo, that Death found her husband. Somehow it made sense that the two of them would marry there, caught halfway between the Living and the Afterlife.

Wilbur felt a hand on his right shoulder.

“You seem better,” Techno said, looking down at Wilbur.

And it, by some miracle, was true. Wilbur’s body had reformed entirely. As the prophet looked down at his hands, flexing each and every one of his fingers, he wondered how he hadn’t noticed it before.

Tommy was still embracing him, sobbing softly into his chest.

With his new arms, Wilbur hugged his little brother.

Chapter End Notes

Something about Wilbur's bio dad sending him to his death vs Phil risking everything to save Wilbur from the afterlife blah blah blah---

Anyway, don't mind me! Just wrapping up Phil's arc from "How to Fly with Clipped Wings" while we have some spare time!

Anyway, I just graduated from college yesterday! I now have a college degree! Ahhhh!
/pos

Big shoutout to Sara, who read this chapter first and helped me get confident enough to finally post it. Make sure to check out [her wonderful fanart for this series!](#) She is a great artist.

One more chapter left of Wilbur's story!

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr!](#) Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will make Wilbur's epilogue 3% fluffier.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

On the farm, Wilbur rarely got out of bed before 10:30. He was typically the last one to wake, since Techno preferred to rise with the sun, tending to the animals and crops from first light, and Tommy seemed to sleep more out of habit than any physical need, averaging maybe four hours a night. As a result, breakfast was usually cleaned up by the time Wilbur bothered to roll off his mattress, but whoever made the morning meal would always leave something on the table for him: maybe a bit of extra pancake mix, or some fresh fruit.

Wilbur had a few responsibilities. As the Blood God's high priest and prophet, Tommy designated some prayers to him. It was still a bit unnerving to occasionally hear a random voice pop into his head, asking for everything from salvation to help finding lost keys, but the prophet did his best to assist everyone, passing on the tougher cases to Tommy.

But there were no voices in his head this morning. As Wilbur stepped out onto the back porch of Techno's cabin, coffee mug in his right hand and guitar slung against his back, he was struck by how perfect the day was. Only a few clouds traced their way across the sky, with just a hint of summer in the spring breeze. He couldn't have imagined a more pleasant weather forecast.

Techno was in the fields, tending to his potato crops. Wilbur vaguely considered helping before shaking the idea out of his head. He wasn't in the mood for long-winded lectures on fertilizer.

Turning slightly, Wilbur spotted Tommy sitting under a tree, staring up at the sky. The prophet made his way over, leaving what was left of his coffee sitting on the porch step. He'd clean it up later.

"Tommy!" Wilbur shouted, startling the boy, "How are you?"

The god saluted Wilbur, scooting over so they could both lean against the tree trunk. "I'm good! Just looking for Phil."

Of course. Phil was coming home today, back from his latest adventure. Wilbur was eager to see him again. Two or three-week-long excursions were tolerable, but Phil had been gone for nearly six at this point, and Wilbur wanted a hug from his dad.

The prophet sat down next to Tommy, both boys looking up towards the sky expectantly.

"How long have you been waiting out here?" Wilbur asked.

Tommy shrugged. "A few hours. I don't want to miss him."

Tommy always did this when he knew one of them was coming back. Whenever Wilbur took a weekend trip to the nearest town for supplies, he'd always find the boy perched on the front porch, practically flying down the steps the second he spotted his older brother.

"Well," Wilbur said, pulling his guitar from his back, "We might as well make the most of the wait."

Tommy's eyes lit up, grinning at Wilbur as the man strummed a few warm-up chords.

"What'll it be?" Wilbur asked, returning the smile.

"Something new," Tommy said immediately, not hesitating for a single moment, "The song you were writing last night."

Wilbur snorted. "You little spy. I can't get any privacy in this house."

Tommy showed absolutely no guilt. "You're the one who screams your music at 2 a.m.! You can't blame me for having ears, bitch."

Wilbur laughed as he began the song, Tommy clapping along in complete delight. A few minutes later, Techno rose from his field, wandering over.

"Look who's finally up," he said, but there was an easy smile on his face, "Did you sleep well?"

Wilbur sighed dramatically. "No. I kept having nightmares about your stupid potatoes. Isn't it enough for them to haunt my every waking moment? And now I see them in my sleep? You've cursed me!"

It was a half-lie. Wilbur's nightmares hadn't been about Techno's stupid potato plots at all. He had woken in a cold sweat, sprinting to Tommy's room to check that the kid was still alive. Then, when the boy began to wake, groggy and confused, Wilbur pressed a hand over his own heart.

It had been beating. They were alive. They were both alive.

Wilbur knew that he was being silly. Other than a bit of his hair that had turned white, there was no evidence that he had died at all, and even less that his little brother had ever been injured. Neither of them had a single scar on their entire bodies.

But Tommy didn't think it was silly. He had let Wilbur curl up in his bed, lulling the man to sleep with the promise of steady, even breaths. It felt good to have the kid in his arms, Wilbur had thought. That way, as he closed his eyes, he could still feel the proof he needed.

Techno snorted, amused by Wilbur's alleged potato nightmares. "Someday you'll understand the honor of farming."

Wilbur rolled his eyes, fairly certain that Tommy was doing the same thing, but before anyone could say anything else, the little god was pointing up towards the sky.

“It’s Phil!” Tommy gasped, jumping to his feet.

It was indeed. Several hundred feet in the air, diving down to meet them, was a man with large, black wings and an even larger smile. The way he soared through the sky could only be described as majestic, descending upon the small group like an angel.

“Fuck—” Techno started, taking a step back, but it was too late. Phil dive bombed him immediately, tackling his best friend to the ground.

“You gotta be faster than that, mate!” Phil laughed, “You hardly even tried to avoid me that time!”

“You and your stupid predator instincts,” Techno groaned, but he made no move to push Phil off. If anything, there was a hint of a smile on his lips. “You’re just an overgrown bird.”

Phil laughed again, wings catching the sunlight like the water’s surface. “And you’re just a sore loser.”

“Phil!” Tommy shouted, clearly ready to have some of the man’s attention. He sprinted over, throwing himself on top of the dogpile.

Techno made a rather undignified *oof* sound, accepting his fate as Phil and Tommy laughed.

“Did you bring me anything?” Tommy asked, hugging Phil close.

“Bring you something?” Phil asked, bewildered, “I sacrificed something to you every few days!”

“Well, duh,” Tommy said, “But I meant like a present, not a sacrifice! It’s different.”

Phil shook his head in fond exasperation, moving the two of them off Techno. As Techno sat up, he straightened a few of Phil’s feathers absentmindedly.

“You’re all ridiculous,” the winged man said, pulling out a small parcel from his bag.

Tommy gasped in delight, ripping open the present.

“Look!” he shouted, holding the gift out for everyone to see. It was a small cow figurine, painted black and white, “Look at it!”

“We see it, Tommy,” Wilbur laughed, finally walking over to the rest of the group. Phil wasted no time in giving him a hug.

“It’s a *cow*,” Tommy gushed, almost reverent as he cupped the figurine in his hands, “I’m going to put him next to my bed. His name will be Henry.”

“I’ve got something for everyone else, too,” Phil said, reaching into his bag again as Techno and Wilbur leaned in for a better look.

First, Phil pulled out an absolutely abysmal-smelling sack, handing it to Techno.

“A priestess told me this fertilizer should double your yield,” Phil said, clearly glad to be passing it off, “Some kind of magic or blessing on it, I’m not quite sure, but the villages near her were all drowning in crops. Looked as though they almost regretted using the stuff.”

Techno accepted the gift graciously, looking quite excited. “Thank you!”

“And Wilbur,” Phil said, reaching into his bag again, “I got you some new notebooks!”

As Wilbur flipped through the pages, he marveled at the sheer beauty of the books. The covers were a rich indigo color, with golden stitching on the spine. Inside, the pages were soft and smooth, specially printed for musicians jotting down notes and lyrics.

“Phil, these are wonderful,” Wilbur said, looking back up.

The man was smiling. “Only the best for my son.”

And, oh, even after months and months of hearing it, Wilbur still couldn’t help but beam at those words. *Phil’s son*. Who would have thought?

“Phil, big man, only man ever,” Tommy interrupted, “How is Kristin doing?”

Phil turned his attention back towards the god. “Busy,” he said, something distant in his eyes, “The Essempi’s wars are spreading. We might want to step in pretty soon. But she was happy to see me. You guys should visit her, she was asking about you.”

“So you just spent six weeks in the Afterlife?” Wilbur asked. The man had prayed occasional messages to Tommy, but those had been sparse enough to leave plenty of questions.

Phil shook his head. “Nah, not really. I mean, I spent most of my time there, but I also did some more renovations.”

The man had been fixing up an old, flooded ocean temple for over a century. According to Tommy and Techno, it was an absolute death trap. Wilbur couldn’t wait to see it someday.

Phil looked off into the distance, as though he could still see the ruins in front of him. “It looks wonderful. I should be done fixing it up soon.”

Techno snorted. “You’ve been saying that for seventy years.”

“And I mean it this time!” Phil insisted, “I’ve just got a bit of landscaping to do, and I need to dig up the yard to replace some plumbing. The rest of the actual repairs are done. You are going to lose your mind when you see it, Techno, I swear!”

Wilbur loved that Phil was a wanderer, always looking for new adventures and discoveries, finding joy in ruins and cities alike. The way his father’s face lit up while telling stories was worth any length of time apart.

Still, it was good to have him home.

“Maybe when you’re done, you could have your wedding there,” Tommy suggested, a false innocence in his voice.

Phil laughed. “How many times do I have to tell you, mate?” he said, “Me and Kristin are happy with how things ended up. We don’t need another wedding or vow renewal or anything.”

Tommy huffed. “Well, *I* still think we should redo the ceremony. You guys kept interrupting me! I want a chance to do it better!”

“We were in a bit of a hurry, Tommy,” Phil smiled, “Wilbur was fading away, remember?”

Techno elbowed Tommy, causing the boy to yelp and glare. “Yeah, and what else did you want them to say?” the larger man asked, “‘*Til death do us part?*’ I don’t think that bit even applies to them.”

“Well,” Tommy said, “We should still do a reception, with cake and shit. Invite everyone we know over.”

Phil laughed outright at the suggestion, turning to Techno. “Can you imagine that? All the gods giving me wedding gifts? Figuring out where to seat everyone would be a literal nightmare.”

The mood was so light, the sunlight so warm, that Wilbur almost regretted having to ask his next question.

“And Quackity...?” Wilbur said, scared to hear the answer.

Every time Phil went out on one of his expeditions, he’d stop in the Essempi for a day or two, trying to find any sign of the lost cultist. Judging by the way the man’s face fell, this trip had been another dead end.

Phil shook his head. “I asked around again. No sign of him. He certainly hasn’t fallen under Kristin’s domain yet, but beyond that, he could be anywhere.”

Wilbur tried to not look too upset, lowering his gaze.

“Maybe we need to try a new plan,” Techno suggested, deep in thought, “Could any of the other gods help? Maybe Tommy could pull in a favor or two. Like that memory god. If he’s in charge of everyone’s memories, he’s bound to know something.”

Tommy sighed, shaking his head. “Karl’s powers don’t work like that. He’s not going to know shit about Quackity.”

“Then there’s nothing to do,” Wilbur said, completely failing to hide the disappointment in his voice.

“Of course there’s something we can do,” Phil said, “We can keep looking. And if he shows up in Kristin’s domain, we’ll make sure to bring a soul down with us. No repeats of last time.”

Wilbur attempted a smile. “What, no more marriages?”

Something flashed in Phil’s eyes, dark and mischievous. “If any of you try to marry Kristin, I’ll show you why they used to call me the Angel of Death.”

Techno laughed, shaking his head. “Don’t worry about that, Phil. Your wife’s too scary.”

“Wife?” Wilbur asked innocently, “Techno, what are you talking about? Phil doesn’t have a wife.”

“Oh no, not this again,” Phil groaned, “You can’t convince me that Kristin’s not real! Me marrying her literally saved your life, you were all there!”

Tommy shook his head sadly. “He’s going senile,” he said, looking over to Techno, “I don’t even know what a ‘wife’ is.”

Phil lightly whacked Tommy and Wilbur with his wings, causing them to both yelp.

“It’s what you deserve, you little shits,” Phil said, “And after I gave you presents. Ungrateful.”

“I can’t believe that you would resort to violence in front of Henry!” Tommy said, holding up the cow figurine, “Now you’re not getting *your* present!”

That caught Phil’s attention. “*My* present?”

“I had gifts for everyone,” Tommy said, crossing his arms, “But now I think you don’t deserve them!”

“Hey, don’t lump me in with Phil!” Techno said, elbowing the man out of the way, “Show us the presents, Tommy.”

That was apparently all the kid needed to fold completely, immediately reaching into his pocket and pulling out a pile of something shiny.

Wilbur’s eyes widened. He would have recognized that jewelry anywhere. In Tommy’s hands were the very same bracelets that Eret had been wearing the first night in the temple. The ones that had been Wilbur’s first sacrifices to the Blood God.

“You...” Wilbur looked at the jewelry, eyes wide, “Tommy, is this...?”

Tommy nodded. “I kept all of it. Every sacrifice is in the basement now, if you want to look at them later. Well, except for the piece I traded for your guitar, but that one was kind of ugly anyway.”

Wilbur could hardly believe what he was hearing. “Why?” he asked.

“Are you serious? It looked like someone had left it out in the sun to melt—”

“No,” Wilbur interrupted, “I mean, why did you *keep* them?”

Tommy gave Wilbur a quizzical look, as though the question was silly. “Because you gave it to me, obviously. The sacrifices remind me of you. Why would I ever want to get rid of any of it?”

Wilbur didn’t know how to respond to that. Luckily, he didn’t have to figure it out. Tommy was already sorting through the four bracelets, untangling them from each other.

“Here,” Tommy said, handing a golden cuff to Techno. The item was exquisite, with inlaid rubies and remarkably delicate carvings. It covered the man’s whole wrist as he slipped it on, like the world’s most beautiful and least practical piece of armor.

“It reminded me of you,” Tommy said.

Techno looked up, wonder on his face. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Tommy said, “This ruby here looks kind of like a potato.”

Techno immediately burst into laughter at that, pulling his little brother close.

“Thank you,” he said, resting his chin on the top of Tommy’s head. The kid melted into his hold for a few seconds before squirming his way out.

“And Phil!” he said, “I know you don’t like heavy jewelry, so this one’s for you!”

The bracelet in question was a fragile-looking thing, nothing more than a single diamond attached to a thin, gold chain. It was breathtaking. Phil did not waste any time clasping it around his wrist.

“It’s gorgeous, Tommy,” Phil said, unable to take his eyes off the bracelet. He kept twisting his hand in the light, watching the sunbeams reflect through the gemstone.

Techno grinned. “Birds like shiny things, right Wilbur?”

“Oh, fuck off,” Phil laughed, “As though you weren’t about to cry over your gift.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Techno said fondly, watching as Tommy jumped into Phil’s arms. The two of them hugged for a moment, Phil wrapping his wings around the kid.

“And Wilbur!” Tommy said, turning to face his final brother.

Wilbur’s heart did something funny at that. Somehow, despite the fact that everyone was getting gifts, it still felt miraculous that Tommy had something for him.

With a flash of gold, Tommy held out another bracelet, but Wilbur wasn’t even looking at it. His eyes were locked onto his little brother, taking in the kid’s smile.

“For me?” he asked, barely a whisper.

“Of course *for you,*’ idiot,” Tommy said, “You’re the reason we got these sacrifices in the first place. You deserve one.”

The piece was a charm bracelet, little emeralds dangling off like fruit on a branch. Carefully, Wilbur reached out with cupped palms, letting Tommy place the jewelry in his hands.

“The rest of us all have emeralds,” Tommy said, “It only makes sense that you get a piece too, since you’re family.”

Wilbur looked up, hints of disbelief on his face.

Tommy smiled. “We’re brothers, you know?”

Wilbur started outright crying at that, clenching the bracelet tightly in his fist and pulling the god close to his chest.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“There’s nothing to thank me for,” Tommy insisted, “You belong here. The bracelet’s just to help you remember that.”

Wilbur pulled Tommy even closer. He’d burn down empires for this kid.

“I’m glad you’re real,” he whispered, kissing the top of his little brother’s head.

Tommy looked visibly confused by that, trying to figure out what Wilbur meant. After a few seconds, the expression fell from his face, replaced by something deeply content.

“I’m glad you’re real too,” Tommy said, resting his head on Wilbur’s chest, “It’s good that you’re here. You filled something that was missing.”

Wilbur’s heart swelled impossibly large at that.

“I love you, Tommy. All three of you. I love you all so much.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “What else is new? While we’re on the topic of obvious shit, I love you too.”

“Hey, stop hoggin’ all the Wilbur hugs to yourself, Tommy,” Techno said, coming over to wrap his arms around his brothers, “I swear, gods can be so selfish...”

“Don’t leave me out!” Phil said, wings encircling the whole group.

“Hey, wait!” Tommy shouted, “I didn’t even get to give myself the fourth bracelet! Look! Isn’t it cool?”

As Techno and Phil complimented Tommy’s bracelet, a simple, medium-sized gold chain, Wilbur tried to take stock of the life that was now in front of him. Even after months of living it, it still felt completely unreal, somehow more perfect than what he had dreamed of in that dingy temple basement.

For years, family had meant obligation. It had meant shared roofs and meals and blood, with affection as a reward, not a requirement. But here, on this little farm, Wilbur was beginning to rethink that definition.

These people were his family, and Wilbur was loved. It didn't matter what else was true. That much, he believed.

Chapter End Notes

(Pssst don't think too hard about why Phil doesn't like heavy jewelry)

It's time for me to get sentimental! This is the longest fic I've ever written (not even counting the first two fics in the series), and it's the most attention I've ever gotten on this website! I'm literally honored that so many of you have kudos and bookmarked this installment. I can't express how thankful I am to have people who actively like my silly little stories.

And before you cry, this series isn't over yet! I still have a Quackity spin-off in the works, and well as some other ideas. Make sure to bookmark/subscribe to the series if you want to see more in this AU!

Again, thank you for all your support. It's more than I had ever hoped for.

(And to the literally 1000 of you who skipped Phil's installment to get right to Wilbur's, maybe go back and read that one lol. It'll give you a lot more context.)

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